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Chetham's

Concerns And Complaints Policy

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Chetham's School of Music (**the School**) aims to ensure that any concern or complaint is managed sympathetically, efficiently, quickly and at the appropriate level and resolved as soon as possible. We will try to resolve every concern or complaint in a positive way with the aim of putting right a matter which may have gone wrong and, where necessary, we will review our systems and procedures in light of the circumstances of the complaint. We follow the procedures outlined in Part 7 of the *Independent Schools Regulations Guidance 2019*. This policy does not cover queries or questions which are part of the day-to-day communication between parents and staff.
- 1.2 We recognise that a difficulty which is not resolved quickly and fairly can soon become a cause of resentment and so we need to know as soon as possible if there is any cause for dissatisfaction. Parents and students should never feel that making a complaint will adversely affect a student or his / her opportunities at the school. This policy distinguishes between a concern or difficulty which can be resolved informally and a formal complaint which will require investigation and a written decision.
- 1.3 **"Parent(s)" / "You"** includes a current or legal guardian or education guardian, and may at our discretion include a parent whose child has recently left the School.
- 1.4 We aim to resolve any complaints in a timely manner. Timescales for each stage are set out below in the relevant paragraphs. When we refer to **working days**, we mean Monday to Friday, when School is open during term time. The dates of terms are published on the School's website.
- 1.5 The complaints process is only available to 'parents of students', meaning current registered students. This procedure does not apply to prospective students or their parents or apply to the parents of former students unless the complaint or concern was registered initially when the student was still registered.

2 Management of Complaints

2.1 Complaints Co-ordinators & Investigating officers

- 2.1.1 The Complaints Co-ordinator is the Joint Principal (NS's) PA, Mrs Lesley Haslam. Investigating officers would be members of the Extended Leadership Group appointed by the Joint Principal (NS).

The Joint Principal (NS) is responsible for the training in managing of complaints.

- 2.1.2 The main responsibilities of the Complaints Co-ordinator are to:
- (a) co-ordinate the complaints procedures in school and be the first point of contact where matters remain unresolved
 - (b) arrange assistance during any aspect of the complaints procedure for parents who require this, for example, because of a disability
 - (c) monitor the keeping, confidentiality and storage of records in relation to complaints

The main responsibilities of the investigating officers are to:

- (d) investigate all aspects of the complaint
- (e) compile written responses and conclusions for the Joint Principal's (NS) consideration
- (f) report regularly to both Joint Principals with respect to complaints.

2.2 The School's complaints procedure has three stages:

2.2.1 **Stage 1:** informal raising of a concern or difficulty with a member of staff orally or in writing - further details of this procedure are set out in part 5.

2.2.2 **Stage 2:** a formal complaint in writing to the Joint Principal (NS) - further details of how to make a formal complaint and the relevant procedures are set out in Appendix 1.

2.2.3 **Stage 3:** a reference to the Complaints Panel - further details of how to request a Panel Hearing and the procedures to be followed are set out in Appendix 2.

2.3 A summary of the School's complaints procedure is set out in Appendix 3.

2.4 Separate procedures apply in the event of a child protection / safeguarding issue, or if the Joint Principals expel or require the removal of a student from the School and the parents seek a Review by the Governing Body of that decision.

2.5 If the complaint is considered to be vexatious, it will be discounted. See below.

3 Confidentiality

3.1 A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they were resolved at Stage 1, Stage 2 or proceeded to a Panel hearing at stage 3. The number of formal complaints registered during the preceding school year will be supplied at the end of this policy. The written record includes the actions taken by the School as a result of complaints; and identifies whether the students concerned are 'boarding' or 'day', these are kept on a confidential area on SharePoint.

- 3.2 Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.
- 3.3 Retention, from September 2020 the DfE, as regulator, advised that complaints which do not have a safeguarding element must be retained for a minimum period of 7 years i.e. until the 25th birthday of the student. SEND and other support may be retained for another 6 years until age 31.
- 3.4 Where there is a safeguarding concern records concerning allegations of abuse must be preserved for the term of any investigation. Any records which might be of personal interest to victims and survivors of the IICSA may be retained according to the IICSA recommendation 17 which suggested in 2022 a minimum period of 75 years for records about child sexual abuse and allegations of child sexual abuse.
- 3.5 The School's Complaints Log is a summary (updated at the end of each half-term) of Concerns / Complaints relating to students who are still on the School's roll.

4 Complaints to the DfE or the Independent Schools Inspectorate

- 4.1 The DfE cannot investigate individual complaints about the School but as a regulator it has certain powers if the School does not meet the standards it sets. The DfE can be contacted here: DfE Complaints form.
- 4.2 The School is inspected by ISI, an independent organisation which reports to the Government on schools. Parents may contact ISI if they have a concern or complaint.
- 4.3 ISI will usually expect parents to have followed the School's formal complaints procedure before contacting them. However, you can report your concerns to ISI on 020 7600 0100 (ISI).

5 Serial, Persistent and Unreasonable Complaints

- 5.1 It is always within the best interests of the child, the parents and the School to work together to resolve issues as they arise. We refer to the guidance on best management of School complaints and the subsection on 'Managing serial and persistent complaints' which includes vexatious complaints.
- 5.2 The Office of the Independent Adjudicator defines the characteristics of a 'frivolous' or 'vexatious' complaint as:
 - 5.2.1 complaints which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious
 - 5.2.2 insistence upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and / or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason
 - 5.2.3 insistence upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner
 - 5.2.4 complaints which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance
 - 5.2.5 demands for redress that lack any serious purpose or value

- 5.3 A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable when the complainant:
- 5.3.1 refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
 - 5.3.2 refuses to cooperate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved
 - 5.3.3 refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaint's procedure
 - 5.3.4 insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice
 - 5.3.5 introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on, or raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
 - 5.3.6 makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
 - 5.3.7 changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
 - 5.3.8 seeks an unrealistic outcome
 - 5.3.9 makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with
 - 5.3.10 pursues more than one complaint simultaneously
 - 5.3.11 uses malicious, aggressive, intimidating or violent, abusive, discriminatory or offensive language or behaviour by voice, in writing or electronically, including, but not limited to publishing in social media or publications.
 - 5.3.12 Tries to obtain an outcome which is unavailable via the complaints procedure e.g. compensation claim; damages; refund of fees overturning a decision regarding a student's behaviour.
 - 5.3.13 Pursues a complaint without reasonable foundation;
 - 5.3.14 Pursues a complaint where the time and cost of investigating and processing the complaint is disproportionate to the issue.
 - 5.3.15 Inexplicably delays the complaint.
 - 5.3.16 makes the complaint for unjustified, inappropriate or improper purpose(s).
- 5.4 The Joint Principal will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before dismissing a complaint as unreasonable, and normally only after consultation with the Chair of Governors.

- 5.5 The complainant may request an appeals panel be convened to determine the single issue of whether the School's dismissal of the original complaint was justified.
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6 Stage 1 - Dealing With Concerns And Difficulties Informally

1 Informal resolution of a concern

- 1.1 We expect that most concerns can be resolved informally. For example, dissatisfaction about some aspect of teaching or pastoral care or a billing error should be able to be resolved by the relevant member of staff. Complaints of discrimination, harassment or victimisation are taken very seriously and may need to be dealt with at **Stage 2** without action at **Stage 1**. You can bring matters to the attention of the Joint Principals that are of concern, but not at stage 2 complaint.
- 1.2 A concern or complaint notified to a member of staff may be noted, together with the action taken, on a standard complaints form. A sample of the form is set out at Appendix 4.

2 Who to contact

- 2.1 Where appropriate, concerns should initially be raised as follows:
- 2.1.1 **Educational issues:** if the matter relates to the classroom, the curriculum or special educational needs, please speak or write to the relevant Head of Department. For more serious concerns, contact the relevant Head of School.
 - 2.1.2 **Music issues:** a problem about music matters should be raised with the Head of Department. For more serious concerns, contact the Assistant Principal (Music).
 - 2.1.3 **Pastoral care:** for concerns relating to matters outside the classroom, please speak or write to the Head of House or Head of School. For more serious concerns, please contact the Assistant Principal (Academic and Pastoral)
 - 2.1.4 **Disciplinary matters:** a problem over any disciplinary action taken or a consequence imposed should be raised first of all with the relevant Head of House or Head of School.
 - 2.1.5 **Financial matters:** a query relating to fees or extras should be stated in writing to the Bursar.
- 2.2 A concern provided in writing will usually be acknowledged by telephone, or e-mail or letter within **two working days** of receipt during term time and as soon as practicable during the holidays. A matter raised orally will not necessarily be acknowledged in writing.
- 2.3 A concern which has not been resolved by informal means within **15 working days** should be notified in writing as a formal Stage 2 complaint using the procedure set out in Appendix 1.
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Appendix 1

Stage 2 - Formal Complaint

1 How to make a formal complaint

- 1.1 If a parent is dissatisfied with the response to the complaint under **Stage 1**, or the complaint requires investigation or involves dissatisfaction with some aspect of the School's policies or management, the complaint should be made under **Stage 2**.
- 1.2 The full details of the complaint should be set out in writing and sent with all relevant documents and full contact details to the Joint Principal (NS).
- 1.3 The complaint will be acknowledged by telephone, e-mail or letter within **two working days** during term time, and as soon as practicable during the holidays, indicating the action that is being taken.

2 Investigation

- 2.1 The Joint Principal (NS) will ask a senior member of staff to act as Investigator and / or may involve one or more members of the Governing Body. The Investigator[s] may request additional information from you and may wish to speak to you personally and to others who have knowledge of the circumstances. Written notes will be kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint. The Investigator[s] will prepare a report on the investigation which will be considered by the Joint Principal (NS).

3 Decision

- 3.1 The Joint Principal (NS) will then notify the complainant by telephone, e-mail or letter of their Stage 2 decision and the reasons for it within **10 working days** from the receipt of the formal complaint.
- 3.2 Please note that any complaint received within one month of the end of a term or half term is likely to take longer to resolve owing to the presence of school holidays and the unavailability of personnel required for the investigation to be undertaken properly.
- 3.3 If a parent is dissatisfied with the Joint Principal's decision, the parent can request that the complaint be referred to the Complaints Panel under Stage 3 using the procedure set out set out in Appendix 3.

Appendix 2

Stage 3 - Complaints Panel

1 What is a Complaints Panel hearing?

- 1.1 A Complaints Panel hearing is a review of the decisions taken at Stage 2 by the Joint Principal (or in circumstances where the formal complaint concerns a Joint Principal, a member of the Governing Body appointed to act in their place). It is a full merits hearing, not just a check of the process. The Complaints Panel is appointed by or on behalf of the proprietor. The Panel will not consider any new areas of complaint which have not been previously raised as part of the complaints procedure.
- 1.2 The role of the Panel is to establish the facts surrounding the complaints that have been made by considering:
 - 1.2.1 the documents provided by both parties and
 - 1.2.2 any representations made by the Parents and the Joint Principal (s)
 - 1.2.3. to reach a decision, on the balance of probabilities, as to whether the complaint should be upheld in whole or in part
- 1.3 It is not within the powers of the Panel to make any financial award, nor to impose sanctions on staff, students or parents. The Panel may make recommendations on these matters or any other issues to the Joint Principals and / or to the Governing Body, as appropriate.

2 How to request a Complaints Panel hearing

- 2.1 A request for a hearing before the Complaints Panel must be put in writing to the Complaints Co-ordinator within five working days of the decision complained of. The request will usually only be considered if the procedures at Stages 1 and 2 have been completed.
- 2.2 The written request should include:
 - 2.2.1 a copy of all relevant documents and full contact details
 - 2.2.2 details of all the grounds of the complaint and the outcome desired
 - 2.2.3 a list of the documents which the parents believe to be in the School's possession and wish the Panel to see and
 - 2.2.4 whether you propose to be accompanied to the hearing by someone who is legally qualified (see paragraph 3.3 below).
- 2.3 If assistance or reasonable adjustments with the request is required, for example because of a disability, please inform the Complaints Co-ordinator of this and they will be happy to make appropriate arrangements.
- 2.4 The Complaints Co-ordinator will acknowledge the request for a hearing in writing, **normally within five working days** of receipt during term time and as soon as practicable during the holidays.
- 2.5 The Complaints Panel hearing will take place within **twenty working days** of receipt of the request. However, note that the Panel will not normally sit during half terms or other school holidays.

3 Planning the hearing

- 3.1 As soon as reasonably practicable, and in any event at least **ten working days** before the hearing, the Complaints Co-ordinator will send written notification to each party of the date, time and place of the hearing.
- 3.2 Copies of any additional documents you wish the Panel to consider should be sent to the Complaints Co-ordinator to be received at least **five working days** prior to the hearing.
- 3.3 You may be accompanied to the hearing by another person, for example a relative, teacher or friend. The Panel hearing is not legal proceedings and so legal representation is not necessary. If you do wish to be accompanied by someone who is legally qualified, you should have notified the Complaints Co-ordinator of this in your initial request for a Panel hearing. If you did not do so and you wish to be accompanied by a legally qualified person, you must inform the Complaints Co-ordinator of this at least five working days prior to the hearing and the parents should note that the Panel will wish to speak to them directly and this person will not be permitted to act as an advocate.
- 3.4 The Complaints Co-ordinator will circulate a copy of the bundle of documents to be considered by the Panel to all parties at **least three working days** prior to the hearing.
- 3.5 The Panel will have an initial meeting before the hearing to decide on any witnesses they may wish to call, who will chair the hearing and if the School requires a representative to attend. They should inform Complaints Co-ordinator whether witnesses will be required to be available for questioning at the Hearing and whether it might be appropriate for the student to be invited.

4 Composition of the Panel

- 4.1 The Panel will normally comprise three individuals who have no detailed prior knowledge of the circumstances of the complaint, including members of the Governing Body and at least one independent member who has no connection with the governance, management and running of the School.
- 4.2 The parents may ask the Complaints Co-ordinator to tell them who has been appointed to sit on the Panel ahead of the hearing.
- 4.3 The Panel members will choose one of themselves to be the Chair of the Panel throughout the proceedings.
- 4.4 All statements made at the hearing will be unsworn. All present will be entitled, should they wish, to write their own notes for reference purposes.
- 4.5 A clerk appointed by the Panel will take a handwritten note of the proceedings.
- 4.6 All those attending the hearing are expected to show courtesy, restraint and good manners or, after due warning, the hearing may be adjourned or terminated at the discretion of the Chair. If terminated, the original decision will stand. Any person who is dissatisfied with any aspect of the way the hearing is conducted must say so before the proceedings go any further and their comment will be minuted.

- 4.7 The Chair may, at their discretion, adjourn the hearing for further investigation of any relevant issue. This may include an adjournment to take legal advice.
- 4.8 A hearing before the Complaints Panel is a private proceeding. No notes or other records or oral statements about any matter discussed in or arising from the proceeding shall be made available directly or indirectly to the press or other media.

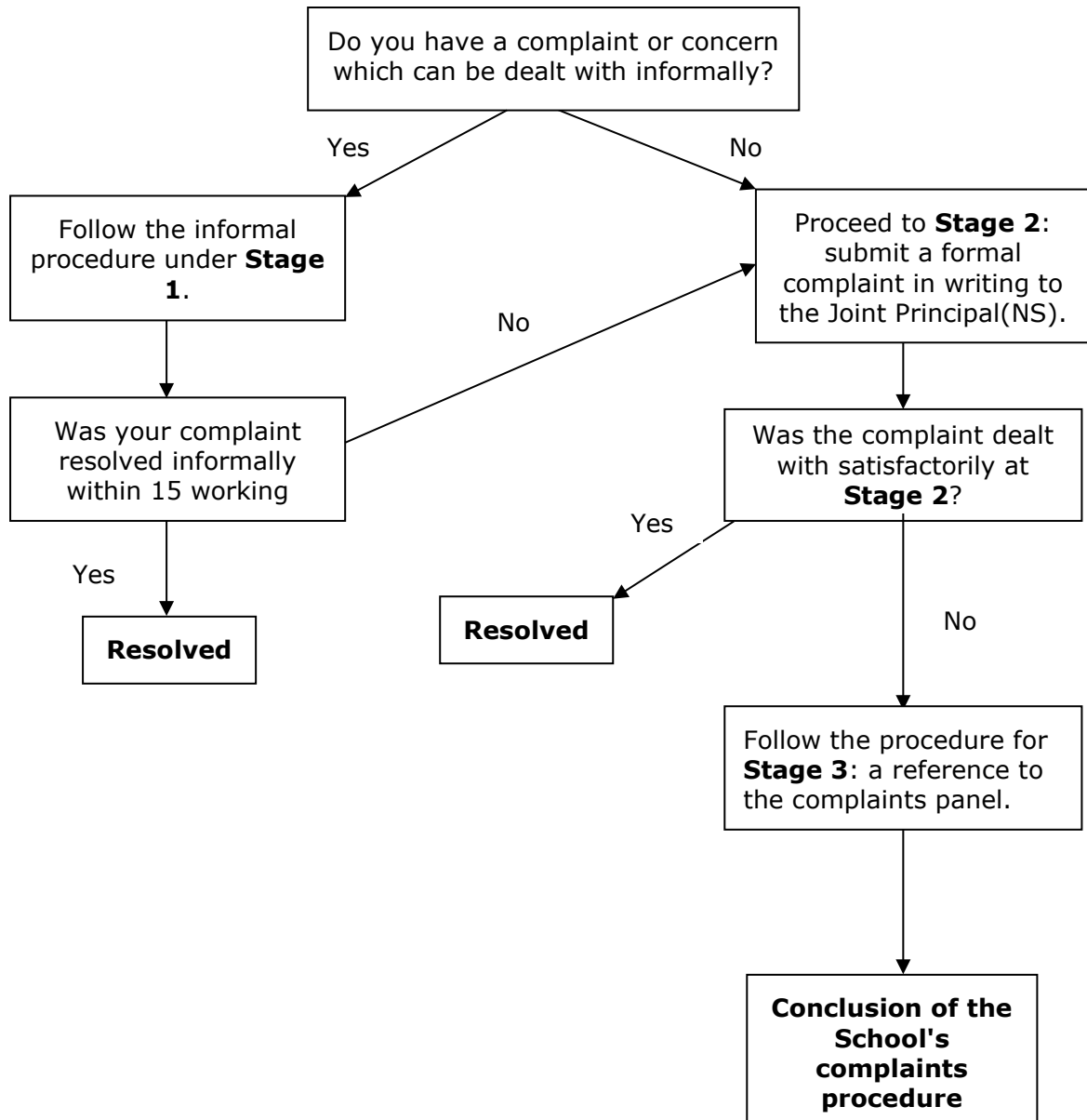
5 The decision

- 5.1 The Panel will reach a decision on a balance of probabilities unless there is an agreed position.
- 5.2 The decision, findings and any recommendations will be confirmed in writing to the complainant and the person complained about by electronic mail, normally within ten working days of the hearing. If the parents do not wish to receive the decision by electronic mail, they should inform the Complaints Co-ordinator of this so that a copy may be given or posted to them.
- 5.3 The decisions, findings and any recommendations will also be available for inspection on the School premises by the Governing Body and the Joint Principals.
- 5.4 The completion of Stage 3 represents the conclusion of the School's complaints procedure. The panel's decision is final, and neither the complaints nor the exclusion appeal procedure can be used to overturn the outcome.

The Panel Hearing
Part 1 – Panel and Complainants
<p>Agenda:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome and introductions 2. Presentation of complaint 3. Clarifying questions from the panel following the presentation of complaint 4. Next Steps <p style="text-align: center;">(This part of hearing closes)</p>
Part 2 - Panel Meeting
Panel to consider the complaint and any issues to be addressed by School staff
BREAK
Part 3 - Panel and School Staff
<p>Agenda:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome and introductions 2. The panel ask for the school to respond to questions the panel have relating to the complaint. 3. Next steps <p style="text-align: center;">(This part of hearing closes)</p>
Part 4 - Panel Debrief (alone)
Panel meet to discuss the complaint and to reach a decision, on the balance of probabilities, as to whether the complaint should be upheld in whole or in part.

Appendix 3

Procedural Flowchart



Appendix 4

Complaints Form

This form may be used as a possible framework by any member of staff who receives a complaint or a parent who wishes to make a complaint. It should be passed to the Complaints Co-ordinator, Joint Principal NS's PA.

What is the nature of the complaint? (Please tick)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Staff conduct	<input type="checkbox"/> Parental conduct
<input type="checkbox"/> Teaching standards	<input type="checkbox"/> Pastoral care
<input type="checkbox"/> Condition of premises	<input type="checkbox"/> Timetabling
<input type="checkbox"/> Matters of regime and routine	<input type="checkbox"/> Access to or regulation of extracurricular activities
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please give details)	
Please give details of the complaint	
Date[s] of incident	Time[s]
If the complaint is about someone's behaviour please give the names of any witnesses to the incident[s]	
Action taken	
Name	Position (staff or parent)
Signed	Date

Resources

IRMS: <https://irms.org.uk/page/SchoolsToolkit>

IICSA recommendations: <https://www.iicsa.org.uk/reports-recommendations/publications/inquiry/final-report/ii-inquirys-conclusions-and-recommendations-change/part-k-summary-inquirys-recommendations/k10-recommendations-better-protect-children-sexual-abuse.html>

Best Practice: [Best practice guidance for school complaints procedures 2020 - GOV.UK](#)

Independent Schools Standards Guidance 2019:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5cd3fc2fe5274a3fd6ee74b0/Independent_School_Standards-_Guidance_070519.pdf

Complaints Log Academic year 2024-25

4 complaints at stage two.

2 complaints at stage three.

All other issues were resolved at stage one of the complaints process.