

# CONCORD COLLEGE

## COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE FOR PARENTS

The College has long prided itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils. However, if parents do have a complaint, they can expect it to be investigated and treated with appropriate seriousness by the College in accordance with this procedure.

Parents should note that there is a separate, but very similar, student version of this Complaints Procedure. That document is available to students in the Student Handbook and is also handed to all new students as part of a "Welcome Pack" of documents given them on their arrival at the College. The Student Complaints procedure refers to an appeal procedure if they are not satisfied with the handling of their complaint once it has reached a formal stage. Students are then encouraged to involve their parents in contacting the Principal and also enables an appeal to be made to the Trustees of the College - as set out in Stage 3 of the process outlined below under the heading of "Panel Hearing". Please see further down this document in order to read the student version of our Complaints Procedure.

### Stage 1 - Informal Resolution

- It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.
- If parents have a complaint they should normally contact an appropriate senior member of staff such as the Head of Lower School, Vice-Principal (Pastoral), Vice-Principal (Academic), or the Principal. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the senior member of staff cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for him/her to investigate further and consult with other senior colleagues - such as the Principal. If a parent wishes to make a complaint about a Senior Teacher, then the Principal should be contacted since he will handle complaints about Senior Teachers himself.
- The member of staff receiving the complaint will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received. All staff dealing with complaints will make sure that the Vice-Principal (Pastoral) receives a record of any concerns raised by students so that these can be recorded. This in order to comply with new NMS (National Minimum Standards) for Boarding Schools which came into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015.

Should the matter not be resolved within 10 school days (term time), or in the event that the lead member of the senior staff dealing with the complaint and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with stage 2 of this Procedure.

When complaints are made during holiday periods, they will be dealt with as quickly as possible. However, some complaints might require investigations to be conducted in order to address issues raised. This could mean that a full response is not made until an additional period of 10 school days (term time) have elapsed after the conclusion of the holiday in question.

- It should be noted that complaints at this stage can be in writing and that a written complaint does not automatically constitute a formal complaint. An informal complaint can take the form of an email or letter, phone call or face-to-face conversation.

During an investigation of an informal complaint, the following procedure should normally be followed:

1. The complainant should be given an opportunity to put their concern to the appropriate member of the SMT. Although this may initially be in writing, a face-to-face conversation or phone call should always take place.
2. The complainant (especially if it is a student) should be able to bring a friend to any discussion.
3. The member of staff dealing with the concern should undertake appropriate investigations and should consider whether support mechanisms are required for both the complainant and the focus of the complaint while the investigation is under way.
4. Once a conclusion has been reached, the member of the SMT should make sure the complainant is clear what action (if any) or monitoring of the situation has been agreed.
5. This stage should be completed speedily and concluded in writing with appropriate detail.
6. Where no satisfactory solution has been found, the complainant should be informed that s/he will need to consider whether to make a formal complaint in writing to the Principal. To assist in this process a complaint form should be provided (& an example can be found in handbook doc. 11.7).

## **Stage 2 - Formal Resolution**

- If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Principal. The Principal will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- In most cases, the Principal will meet with or speak to the parents concerned, normally within 10 days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- It may be necessary for the Principal to carry out further investigations.
- The Principal will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- Once the Principal is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and parents will be informed of this decision in writing. The Principal will also give reasons for his decision.

During an investigation of a formal complaint, the following procedure should normally be followed:

1. The Principal should acknowledge the complaint in writing.
2. The Principal should consider providing an opportunity to meet with the complainant to supplement any information previously provided.
3. If the complaint is against a member of staff, the Principal should talk to the staff member against whom the complaint has been made.
4. If necessary, the Principal should interview witnesses and take statements from those involved.
5. The Principal should keep reasonable written records of meetings, telephone conversations and other documentation.
6. Once all the relevant facts have been established, the Principal should produce a written response to the complainant. The Principal may wish to meet the complainant to discuss/resolve the matter before confirming the outcome in writing.
7. The written response should include a full explanation of the decision and the reasons for it. Where appropriate, it should include what action the school will take to resolve the complaint.

Stage 1-7 should be completed in 15 school days (term time). However, it is recognised that where the case is complex it may prove difficult to meet this timetable. In such cases, the Principal should write to the complainant giving a revised target date. (When complaints are made during holiday periods, they will be dealt with as quickly as possible. However, some complaints might require investigations to be conducted in order to address issues raised. This could mean that a full response is not

made until an additional period of 10 school days [term time] have elapsed after the conclusion of the holiday in question.)

8. The formal stage response should also advise the complainant that if s/he is not satisfied with the response and wishes to take the matter further, s/he should write to the Chair of Trustees within 15 school days of receiving the outcome letter. The outcome letter should set out the name of the Chair of Trustees and the address to which the complainant can send the letter.

### **Stage 3 - Panel Hearing**

- If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they will be referred to The Chairman of the Board of Trustees, who has been appointed by the Trustees to call hearings of the Complaints Panel.
- The matter will then be referred to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of at least three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the school. Each of the Panel members shall be appointed by The Chairman of the Board of Trustees. The Chairman, on behalf of the Panel, will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally within 20 days.
- If the Panel deems it necessary, it may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter be supplied in advance of the hearing. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties not later than 5 days prior to the hearing.
- The parents may be accompanied to the hearing by one other person. This may be a relative, teacher, friend or representative.
- If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint immediately without the need for further investigation.
- Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out. After due consideration of all facts they consider relevant, the Panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations, which it shall complete within 10 days of the Hearing. The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it. The decision of the Panel will be final. The Panel's findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent in writing to the parents, the Principal, the Trustees and, where relevant, the person complained of.

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential except in so far as is required of the School by paragraph 6(2)(k) of the Education (Independent Schools Standards) Regulations 2002; where disclosure is required in the course of the School's inspection; or where any other legal obligation prevails.

### **Complaints Regarding the Welfare of Boarders**

A separate procedure exists, in accordance with Standard 18 of the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools, for boarders and their parents to raise complaints, and which is made available to boarders, their parents and staff for their information. Boarders and parents can contact the following regarding any complaint concerning a boarder's welfare: the Independent Schools Inspectorate on 020 7600 0100 and ask for Daisy Madder; the local Shropshire educational/ social services which can be accessed on 0345 678 9021. A written record is kept by the Vice-Principal (Pastoral) of all complaints and their outcome, for regular review by the Principal or a senior member of staff. Complaints will be resolved either to the parents' satisfaction, or with an otherwise appropriate outcome which balances the rights and duties of pupils, without unreasonable delay. The complaints procedure includes details of how boarders or parents may appeal against a decision made by the school about their complaint. Students will not be penalised for making a complaint in good faith.

## **Recording Complaints**

Following resolution of a complaint, the College will keep a written record of all complaints and whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing. Records kept will include any actions taken by the College as a result of such complaints. At the College's discretion additional records may be kept which may contain the following information:

- Date when the issue was raised
- Name of parent
- Name of student
- Description of the issue
- Records of all the investigations (if appropriate)
- Witness statements (if appropriate)
- Name of member of staff handling the issue at each stage
- Copies of all correspondence on the issue (including emails and records of phone conversations)

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except to the extent required by paragraph 6(3)(f) of the Education (Independent Schools Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 (as subsequently amended), by the Secretary of State or where disclosure is required by the ISI under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended), or under other legal authority.

Records of complaints are held on the SMT shared drive and the number of complaints received are recorded annually and reported to the Trustees in the Safeguarding Report.

## **Annual Updates & Review**

This Complaints Procedure will be reviewed annually. There were 26 entries made in the Concerns and Complaints register in 2020-2021. Of these, 23 were regarded as more serious complaints and 3 were regarded as less serious concerns. 13 of the 26 complaints and concerns related to boarding.

Reviewed & updated: 27<sup>th</sup> Sept 2021 by JBK

Policy last reviewed by Welfare Committee - 03/12/2021