North London Collegiate School
Founded 1850

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

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1. Introduction

1.1 This is the Complaints Procedure for North London Collegiate School (the School).

1.2 Complaints will be treated by the School in accordance with this Procedure, which complies with Paragraph 33 of Part 7 of Schedule 1 to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. The Standard does not distinguish between 'concerns' and 'complaints'. Any matter about which a parent of a pupil is unhappy and seeks action by the School is considered a complaint, and in the scope of this Procedure.

1.3 A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction however made about actions taken, or lack of action, by the School where a parent and seeks action by the School.

1.4 Parents can be assured that all complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. It is hoped that most complaints will be resolved quickly and informally.

1.5 This is a whole school Procedure which applies from EYFS to Sixth Form.

1.6 This Procedure must be read in conjunction with the following which are available on the School website:

- Privacy Notices
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Terms and Conditions

1.7 This Procedure is available on the School website.

1.8 A copy of this Procedure is held at the Senior School Office for consultation by parents. You may also email the School at Office@nlcs.org.uk to request a hard copy which can be made available in large print or other accessible format if required.

2. Aims, objectives and timescales

2.1 The School aims to work closely with parents to resolve all complaints efficiently and promptly and parents are encouraged to bring any matter causing concern to the School's attention as soon as possible. Whenever possible, a complaint should be raised within three months of the incident, or where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. The School may consider complaints made after three months, but parents should be aware that most complaints will require the School to conduct an investigation and the ability to carry out a full and fair investigation, particularly where pupils may need to be interviewed, becomes increasingly difficult as time elapses. A complaint raised after three months should therefore include details of the issues which led to the delay.

2.2 Working days means Monday to Friday inclusive (excluding public holidays), when the School is open during term time. The term dates are published on the School's website. In the event that the application of this definition is likely to introduce excessive delays, due to intervening School holidays, the School's approach is to take sensible and reasonable steps so as to minimise any hardship or unfairness arising from such delays.

2.3 Timescales for each stage are set out below in the relevant paragraphs. It is expected that the management of every complaint will progress in a timely manner. Where there are exceptional circumstances resulting in a delay to the timescales for a stage of the complaints procedure (such

as other bodies investigating aspects of the complaint), the School will notify the parents and inform them of the new timescales as soon as possible.

2.4 Complaints which are raised in the School holidays will usually be deemed to have been received on the first working day after receipt.

2.5 Where the complaint relates to a pupil in the Early Years setting, however, the School will notify the person who made the complaint of the outcome of the investigation within 28 days of the complaint having been received by the School.

3. Statutory and regulatory framework

3.1 This Procedure complies with Paragraph 33 of Part 7 of Schedule 1 to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

4. Scope and responsibilities

4.1 This Procedure applies to parents and guardians of current registered pupils, and parents of former pupils where the complaint was initially raised when the pupil was still a registered pupil at the School. Save in very exceptional cases, and only at the Headmistress's discretion, no complaints will be considered if more than one School term has passed since the pupil left the School.

4.2 The following are exempt from this Procedure because they are covered by separate procedures:

- matters likely to require a child protection investigation;
- whistleblowing;
- staff grievances and disciplinary procedures;
- complaints about services provided by other providers who may use the School premises or facilities;
- complaints related to data protection;
- complaints about Governors (accessible by Staff and Governors only, but can be provided on request).

4.3 Separate procedures apply in the event that a child protection issue arises or if the Headmistress expels or requires the pupil to leave the School and the parents seek a Governors' Review of that decision.

4.4 Any concern about the safety of your child should be notified immediately to the person you believe is best placed to take urgent action and should be confirmed in writing to the Headmistress. Safeguarding related concerns should be raised via the reporting procedures set out in the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

4.5 'The Headmistress' means the whole-school Headmistress of North London Collegiate School. Where parents bring a complaint to the Head of the Junior School this is considered to be an informal complaint unless it is escalated to the Headmistress of the whole school.

5. Record keeping

5.1 All staff who are involved in handling any complaint are required to keep a record of their communications with parents, students and other colleagues. Any such record will include the date of the communication, the parties to it and a summary of what was discussed. Wherever possible, such records are made the same day or as soon as possible afterwards.

5.2 The School maintains a central written record of all informal complaints for management purposes to enable any emerging patterns to be identified and monitored. If an Informal Complaint (Stage 1) transitions to a Formal Complaint (Stage 2), the complaint will be noted in the formal complaints log.

6. Informal Complaints (Stage 1)

6.1 Complaints should usually be made initially to an appropriate member of staff. If parents are unsure whom to contact about a complaint, they may contact the School Office who will pass the complaint on to an appropriate staff member. The member of staff who receives any complaint direct may also refer the complaint as appropriate and in accordance with this policy.

6.2 In the Senior School:

6.2.1 academic complaints should, depending on their gravity, be referred to the subject teacher, Head of Department or Deputy Head (Academic);

6.2.2 pastoral complaints should be referred to the Form Tutor, Head of Year, Section Head or Deputy Head (Pastoral), depending on the gravity of the complaint.

6.3 In the Junior School:

6.3.1 academic complaints should be referred to the class teacher, Subject Lead, Deputy Head (Academic) or Head of the Junior School;

6.3.2 pastoral complaints should be referred to the Form Teacher, Phase Leaders, Deputy Head Pastoral or Head of the Junior School

6.4 School staff will pass on any complaint they receive to an appropriate member of staff if they are not best placed to respond to the complaint themselves. They will let parents know if they take such action.

6.5 An oral communication may not necessarily be acknowledged in writing. Where the informal complaint is communicated in writing, the staff member will acknowledge it within two working days.

6.6 The appropriate staff member(s) will usually discuss the issue with the parents, regardless of whether the complaint is made orally or in writing, and take such other action as they consider appropriate to resolve the complaint, including speaking with the student, other members of staff or other students.

6.7 Most cases are informally resolved in this way and an understanding reached between the various parties.

6.8 Where the first contact is made by the parents directly to the Chair of Governors or the Headmistress this will usually be treated as an informal complaint. In such situations, the Chair of Governors or Headmistress are likely to ask for an appropriate member of staff to handle the

complaint informally, but they may choose to handle the complaint informally themselves.

6.9 Informal complaints will normally be handled within 10 working days of the initial complaint.

6.10 Complaints about operational matters can be referred to the relevant support team or the Chief Operating Officer. Complaints about transport should be referred to the transport team.

6.11 The procedure for dealing with an informal complaint about the Head of the School is set out below:

- The parents may choose to raise complaints directly with the Headmistress if they feel that the matter is capable of resolution informally. The complaint may be raised orally or in writing. If in writing, the School will not automatically treat the complaint as a formal (Stage 2) complaint and the Headmistress will endeavour to resolve the complaint informally under Stage 1.

- The Headmistress will acknowledge informal complaints within three working days and will seek to resolve the matter under this Stage 1 by means of direct conversation or a meeting with the parents. Informal complaints will normally be handled within 10 working days of the initial complaint.

- If the parents are dissatisfied with the Headmistress's response to the informal complaint or in the event that the complaint cannot be resolved by informal means, the parents may make a formal complaint under Stage 2 of this procedure as set out in paragraph 7 below.

- Alternatively, the parents may choose to make their complaint about the Headmistress to the Chair of Governors (via the Clerk to the Board Governors]). In this case, the complaint will be treated as a formal complaint under Stage 2 of this procedure as set out in paragraph 7 below.

6.12 Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to the Clerk to the Governors via the School office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential. Different procedures may apply.

7. Formal Complaints (Stage 2)

7.1 A Formal Complaint arises where:

- A parent is not satisfied with the outcome of the Stage 1 process and escalates their complaint to the Headmistress.

- The Headmistress deems that the matter is serious enough to move straight to a formal process from the outset.

The Formal Complaint process requires the parents to refer their complaint to the Headmistress. This includes any complaints for the Senior and the Junior School.

7.2 Where a parent is not satisfied with the outcome of the Stage 1 process, they should put their complaint in writing to the Headmistress setting out the nature of their complaint and their desired outcome. They should usually do this within 15 working days of the School's response at Stage 1.

7.3 All formal complaints received in term time will be acknowledged within 3 working days.

7.4 The Headmistress will decide, after considering the written complaint, the appropriate course of action to take which may include delegating investigation of the complaint to an appropriate senior member of staff.

7.5 The Headmistress will usually invite parents to a meeting before communicating their decision in writing to discuss the complaint and seek clarification if required. The Headmistress would normally ask a member of staff to attend this meeting as a notetaker. Meetings should not be audio or video recorded, except where the School has given express permission to do so.

7.6 Once the Headmistress 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 by the Headmistress of this decision in writing, together with reasons for it.

7.7 The Headmistress shall inform the complainant of the outcome of the complaint within 20 working days from the receipt of the complaint at Stage 2.

7.8 If the complaint is about the Headmistress:

- The complaint should be put in writing to the Chair of Governors (via the Clerk to the Board of Governors]). The complaint should include the same information referred to above.

- The Chair of Governors (via the Clerk to the Board of Governors]) will acknowledge the complaint within three working days of receipt and indicate the action that is being taken and the likely timescale. Such action may include an investigation and/or a meeting with the parent. The parents will usually receive a response to the complaint within 20 working days from the receipt of the complaint.

- If the parents are dissatisfied with the response to the complaint, the parents can request that the complaint be referred to a Complaints Panel under Stage 3, using the procedure set out in paragraph 8 below.

8. Unresolved Complaints: referral to the Complaints Panel (Stage 3)

8.1 If the parents are dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2, they are required to write to the Clerk to the Board of Governors (the Clerk) within 10 working days of the date on which they were notified of the decision to request that their complaint be escalated to a Complaints Panel for consideration. A Complaints Panel will only be convened where Stage 2 of this procedure has been followed. If the complaint is about the Clerk, the Chair of Governors will handle the administration personally.

8.2 In their request the parents should ensure that they state details of those aspect of the complaint about which the parents remains dissatisfied, the outcome desired, copies of any relevant documents they would like the Panel to consider, whether the parents wish to attend the hearing and if so, whether they proposed to be accompanied, and whether they wish to attend in person or remotely.

8.3 If assistance with the request is required, for example because of a disability, the parents should inform the Clerk who will be happy to make appropriate arrangements.

8.4 The Clerk shall acknowledge the request in writing within 5 working days. The Clerk will ask the parents to confirm that they have submitted all relevant documents they would like the Panel to consider. The Clerk may ask them to be provided in chronological order. The Clerk will ask the Headmistress and any other staff involved in the complaint process to produce any other documents/correspondence on which they have relied.

8.5 The Clerk will endeavour to convene the Complaints Panel hearing within 20 working days of confirmation from the parents that all papers have been provided.

8.6 At least 5 working days before the Complaints Panel convenes, the Clerk will arrange for a bundle of documents to be circulated to the parties

8.7 The Clerk will also share with the School and the parent(s) the names of the attendees including the names of the School's representatives. Neither the parent(s) nor the School can request that any particular individual give evidence.

8.8 The Complaints Panel

8.7.1 Each of the Complaints Panel members shall be appointed by the Clerk.

8.7.2 The Complaints Panel will consist of at least three persons who have no detailed prior knowledge of the circumstances of the complaint or being directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, including one Panel member who is independent of the management and running of the School.

8.7.3 The hearing will be chaired by one member of the Complaints Panel (chosen by themselves).

8.7.4 The parents will be sent written notification of the date, time and place of the hearing, or log in details for virtual hearings, together with brief details of the Complaints Panel members.

8.7.5 Parents will be asked to attend the hearing and may be accompanied by one other person. This may be a friend or relative but not a child or young person who is a pupil at the School. The hearing is an internal proceeding, not legal proceedings, and legal representation is not normally considered appropriate. In exceptional cases where the parents wish to bring a legally qualified person to act in their professional capacity, subject to the consent of the Chair of the Complaints Panel, the parents should provide the School with at least seven working days' notice.

8.9 Complaints Panel Hearing

8.10 Unless prior to the commencement of the hearing, a parent confirms that they are satisfied with the outcome of their complaint, the hearing will proceed notwithstanding that the parents may decide not to attend. In these circumstances, the Complaints Panel will consider the parents complaint in his / her absence [•and issue findings on the substance of the complaint.

8.8.1 The Complaints Panel hearing is a review of the decision at Stage 2..

8.8.2 The role of the Complaints Panel is to establish the facts surrounding the complaints that remain in issue by considering:

- the documents provided by both parties and any other written records taken as part of the investigation; and

- any representations made by the parents and the Headmistress;

to review the process and the decision reached at Stage 2, and to consider on the balance of probabilities, whether or not to uphold each complaint.

8.8.3 The Chair of the Complaints Panel will provide the parent(s) with the opportunity to explain their complaint at the Complaints Panel hearing. They should expect to answer questions from Complaints Panel members. The Headmistress will then be invited to outline the School's response and to answer questions from the Complaints Panel. Both the parent(s) and the Headmistress may request permission from the Chair of the Complaints Panel to ask each other

questions. Both the parent(s) and the Headmistress will then be given the opportunity to sum up or say anything further. An appropriate member of staff will be asked to take notes.

8.8.4 The Chair of the Complaints Panel may decide in their absolute discretion that in some circumstances it is appropriate to see the Headmistress and the parent(s) separately during the hearing.

8.8.5 The Hearing is not a legal proceeding and the Complaints Panel shall be under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses to the issues complained of, but may do so and / or may take written statements into account.

8.8.6 All statements made at the hearing will be unsworn. The parties will be entitled to write their own notes for reference purposes.

8.8.7 All those present are expected to show courtesy, restraint and good manners. If they fail to do so and after due warning, the hearing may be adjourned or terminated at the discretion of the Chair. 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 his / her comment will be minuted.

8.8.8 When the Chair of the Panel is satisfied that sufficient consideration has been given to the documentation provided and any representations made by the parties, he / she will conclude the hearing.

8.8.9 The Chair of the Complaints Panel may, at their discretion, adjourn the hearing if he/she consider it appropriate to do so. This may include an adjournment for welfare reasons, to enable additional information to be obtained and/or considered or for the parties to take legal advice on a specific issue arising.

8.9 Complaint Panel decision

8.9.1 The Complaints Panel will make findings about each complaint on the balance of probabilities and may make recommendations.

8.9.2 It is not within the Complaints Panel's power to make any financial award, nor to impose sanctions on staff, pupils or parents, although the Panel may make recommendations about these issues.

8.9.3 After consideration of all matters discussed at the hearing, the Complaints Panel will reach a decision. The minutes of the Complaints Panel hearing together with the Complaints Panel's decision, findings (and the reasons for it) and any recommendations will usually be provided in writing to the parents within 15 working days of the hearing.

8.9.4 The Complaints Panel’s findings and recommendations, if any, will also be shared with the Headmistress and, where appropriate, the person (other than a child) about whom any complaint was made. The decisions, findings and any recommendations including any actions taken to implement them will also be available for inspection on the School premises by the Governing Body and the Headmistress.

8.9.5 The decision of the Panel is final. There will be no further opportunity within the School for consideration of the complaint. The completion of Stage 3 represents the conclusion of the School's complaints procedure.

8.9.6 The School will however ensure that the Panel decision is recorded appropriately and that any

recommendations made in the course of a complaint are properly considered and actioned as appropriate.

9 Early Years Foundation Stage

9.1.1 In order to fulfil the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage, and notwithstanding any other time frames mentioned above, the parents will be notified of the outcome of the investigation within 28 days of the complaint having been received by the School.

9.1.2 In addition to the process detailed above, in the case of complaints concerning the Early Years Foundation Stage (Reception classes), if parents believe the School is not meeting the EYFS requirements they may contact Ofsted and/or the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) if they wish. The contact details are as follows:

- Ofsted, 26-32 Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD Tel: 0300 123 1231
- Independent Schools Inspectorate, CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London, EC1A 9HA Tel: 020 7600 0100

9.2 The School will advise parents if the EYFS setting is to be inspected and after the inspection provide a copy of the report to parents of children attending the School.

10 Records of complaints and data protection

10.1 A written record of formal complaints is retained by the School showing whether:

- the complaints were resolved following a formal procedure or proceeded to a Complaints Panel hearing; and
- what if any action was taken by the School as a result of these complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld).

10.2 The School processes data in accordance with the privacy notices for parents and pupils. When dealing with complaints the School may process a range of information, including but not limited to, the following:

- date when the complaint was raised;
- name of parent/s;
- name of pupil;
- description of the issue;
- records of any investigations;
- witness statements (if applicable);
- name/s of members of staff handling the complaint at each stage;
- copies of all correspondence, notes of meetings and hearings (if applicable); and
- the Complaints Panel's written decision (if applicable).

10.3 The Headmistress, Chief Operating Officer and Governors ensure appropriate consideration is given to the School's obligations under the Data Protection Act 2018 and the UK General Data Protection Regulation to keep such information for no longer than necessary. Records of complaints will be securely retained until the pupil reaches the age of 25, after which the records will be safely destroyed.

10.4 All 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 under Section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 where access is requested by the Secretary of State or where disclosure is required in the course of the School's inspection.

10.5 In accordance with paragraph 32(1)(b) of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, the School will make available to parents of pupils and prospective pupils and provide, on request, to the Chief Inspector, the Secretary of State or an independent inspectorate, details of the complaints procedure and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.

10.6 There were two formal complaints received in the 2025/2026 academic year.

11 Monitoring and evaluation

11.1 The Headmistress and Senior Team will regularly monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of this Procedure.

11.2 The Complaints Procedure will be subject to review every year (or more frequently if changes to legislation, regulation or statutory guidance so require) by the Chief Operating Officer.

11.3 The Complaints Procedure will also be subject to critical review by the Governing Body, and will be reviewed by the relevant committee of the Governing Body on an annual basis.

11.4 The date of the next review is shown on the front page.

APPENDIX A: UNREASONABLE COMPLAINTS

1 We are committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with us. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

2 Where repeated attempts are made by a parent to raise the same complaint after it has been considered at all three stages, this can be regarded as vexatious and outside the scope of the policy.

3 Unreasonable complaints are taken seriously by the School as they put a strain on valuable resources and hinder the progress of proper investigations.

4 We adopt the Department for Education's definition of unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the School, such as if the complainant:

4.1 refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance;

4.2 refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process;

4.3 refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure;

4.4 insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice;

4.5 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;

4.6 makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced;

4.7 changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds;

4.8 repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed);

4.9 refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the School's complaints procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed;

4.10 seeks an unrealistic outcome;

4.11 makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with;

4.12 uses threats to intimidate;

4.13 uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence;

4.14 knowingly provides falsified information;

4.15 publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

5 A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if it is manifestly unjustified, inappropriate, or an improper use of formal procedure.

6 In assessing this, the School shall have regard to all the circumstances of the case and the nature of the complaint itself rather than the nature of the complainant. In assessing all of the circumstances of the case the School will consider a range of factors including:

6.1 whether a complaint has reasonable foundation;

6.2 the history and context of the complaint (and any evidence where relevant);

6.3 whether the time and cost of investigating the complaint is proportionate to the issue(s) complained of;

6.4 whether an investigation of the complaint is likely to cause a disproportionate or unjustified level of disruption, irritation or distress;

6.5 unexplained delay in raising a complaint or issue;

6.6 if the purpose of the complaint is to obtain an outcome which is unavailable via the complaints procedure, such as a claim for compensation, damages or a refund of fees paid;

6.7 any evidence of a complaint being brought for an improper purpose.

7 Whenever possible, the Headmistress and / or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before dismissing a complaint as unreasonable.

8 If the behaviour continues, the School will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it.

9 For complainants who excessively contact the School causing a significant level of disruption, the School may specify methods of communication and limit number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

10 In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the School will immediately inform the police and communicate its actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from the School.