

## SECTION 3.12 – STUDENTS’, BOARDERS’ AND PARENTS’ COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

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### INTRODUCTION

Frensham Heights has long prided itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its students. However, if parents do have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the School with care and in accordance with this Complaints Procedure. Frensham Heights makes its Complaints Procedure available on the School’s website and in the School office during the school day.

Complaints by parents of former students will be dealt with under this Complaints Procedure only if the complaint was initially raised when the student to which the complaint relates was still registered as a student at the School. The only exception to this is if the complaint is a review of a decision taken by the Head to exclude or require the removal of a student under clause 7f of the School’s Terms and Conditions in which case such a review must be requested by no later than seven working days from the date of the decision to exclude or require the removal of a student.

The School will be mindful of its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 in the application of this policy. “Parent(s)” means the holder(s) of parental responsibility for a student about whom the complaint relates.

### WHAT CONSTITUTES A COMPLAINT?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem. It may be made about the School as a whole, about a specific department or about an individual member of staff, and any matter about which a parent is unhappy and seeks action by the School is within the scope of this procedure. A complaint is likely to arise if a parent believes that the School has done something wrong, failed to do something that it should have done or has acted unfairly.

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 Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them. There may also be other circumstances in which the School is required to share information relating to a concern or a complaint in order to comply with its legal or regulatory obligations.

The School is here for your child and you can be assured that your child will not be penalised for a complaint that you or your child raises in good faith.

### SCOPE OF THIS COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of facilities or services by Frensham Heights School, other than complaints that are dealt with under other policies and procedures, including those listed below:

Exceptions	Who to contact
Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs	Concerns about statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs should be raised with the relevant Local Authority.
Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under Safeguarding Policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.
Whistleblowing	The School has an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.
Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the School's internal grievance procedures.
Staff conduct	<p>Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the School's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.</p> <p>Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.</p>
Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.

## THE THREE-STAGE 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 raise the concern with the subject teacher, form tutor, Head of Sixth Form, Head of Pastoral & Progress (Senior School), Head of Junior School or Heads of Boarding Houses through a telephone call, email or meeting. This can usually be arranged directly by phone/email or via reception.
- If the subject teacher or form tutor cannot deal with the matter alone, they may feel the need to discuss the matter with the Head of Department, Heads of Boarding Houses, the Head of Sixth Form, Head of Pastoral & Progress (Senior School), Head of Junior School, the Deputy Heads, or even the Head.
- Complaints made directly to a Head of Department, the Head of Sixth Form, Head of Sixth Form, Head of Pastoral & Progress, Head of Junior School, the Deputy Heads or the Head will usually be referred to the relevant form subject teacher, form tutor or Heads of Boarding Houses unless they deem it appropriate for them to deal with the matter personally.

- The subject teacher, form tutor or Head of Boarding House will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received. Should the matter not be resolved within 5 working days or in the event that the subject teacher, form tutor or Head of Boarding House 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 Complaints Procedure.
- If boarders have a complaint related to boarding, they should raise it with their Head of House in the first instance (either in conversation, by email or through the regular house meetings or surveys). If their complaint is about their Head of House, they should raise it with the Head.
- If the complaint is against the Head, parents should make their complaint directly to the Chair of Governors whose contact details are available from the School on request.

## **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 Head. The Head may in some circumstances deem it appropriate to nominate a staff member to hear the complaint and manage the Stage 2 complaint process. The Head (or their nominee) will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- In most cases, the Head (or their nominee) will speak to the parents concerned, within 5 working days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage. It may be necessary for further investigations to be carried out. The Head (or their nominee) will determine who should carry out any investigation and this may be someone external to the School.
- Written records will be kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- Once the Head (or their nominee) 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 Head (or their nominee) will also give reasons for their decision. In most cases, the Head will make their decision and provide the parents with reasons within 15 working days of the complaint being put in writing.
- If the complaint is against the Head, the complaint should be made to the Chair of Governors. The Chair of Governors will nominate someone to determine the complaint. The Stage 2 process described above will then be followed as if the references to the Head (or their nominee) is to the individual nominated by the Chair of Governors to determine the complaint against the Head.
- If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure.

## **Stage 3 – Panel Hearing**

- If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution) they should do so in writing to the Head of Governance within seven working days of receiving the decision at Stage 2, setting out their grounds of appeal. Any supporting evidence which the parents wish to rely on should also be provided with their grounds of appeal. To the extent the parents are unable to provide their complaint within the time period stipulated due to extenuating circumstances which have impeded the parents from taking action, the parents should request an extension in writing. Such a request should be made to the Head of Governance in advance of the original deadline,

setting out the further time period requested and the reason for this. This will be considered. In the event the parents are unable to provide their complaint within the time period stipulated (including to the extent applicable any extensions if agreed) the School reserves the right to conclude the complaint process and not progress the matter to Stage 3.

- The Head of Governance, who has been appointed by the Governors to call hearings of the Complaints Panel, will then refer the appeal to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of 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.
- The Complaints Panel will appoint one of the Panel members to act as the Chair of the Panel. The Head of Governance, on behalf of the Panel, will then acknowledge the complaint within 5 working days and schedule a hearing to take place within 20 working 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 or further investigation be carried out. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties not later than 5 working days prior to the hearing.
- The parents may attend the hearing and be accompanied to the hearing by one other person if they wish. The Stage 2 decision-taker shall also be entitled to be accompanied to the hearing by one other person if they wish. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not be appropriate and the companion should not be a lawyer. The Panel will decide whether it would be helpful for witnesses to attend.
- The remit of the Panel shall be at the discretion of the Chair of Governors and the manner in which the hearing is conducted shall be at the discretion of the Panel.
- If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint 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 the merits of the complaint and all facts they consider relevant, the Panel will make findings as to whether or not the Stage 2 decision was a reasonable one and decide whether to: dismiss the complaint(s) in whole or in part; uphold the complaint(s) in whole or in part; and make recommendations.
- The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it, within 5 working days of the hearing (although additional time may be required if it is necessary to carry out further investigations following the hearing). The decision of the Panel will be final. A copy of the Panel's findings and recommendations (if any) will be sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the parents, and, where relevant, the person complained about as well as the Chair of Governors and the Stage 2 decision-taker. A copy of the Panel's findings and recommendations (if any) will also be available for inspection on the School premises by the Chair of Governors and the Head.
- Any complaint about a decision taken by the Head to exclude or require the removal of the student under clause 7f of the School's Terms and Conditions will be governed by this Stage 3 of the School's Complaints Procedure. In such circumstances, the Panel may only uphold the complaint and ask the Stage 2 decision-taker to reconsider their decision if they consider, having regard to the process followed by the Head, that the Head's decision to exclude / require the removal of the student was not a reasonable decision for the Head to have taken.

## **TIME FRAME FOR DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS**

All complaints will be handled seriously, sensitively and within clear and reasonable timescales.

It is in everyone's interest to resolve a complaint as speedily as possible: the School's target is to complete the first two stages of the procedure within 20 working days. Stage 3, the Appeal Panel Hearing, will be completed within a further 20 working days.

Please note that, for the purposes of this procedure, working days refers to weekdays (Monday to Friday) during term time, excluding bank holidays and half term. This means that during School holidays it may take longer to resolve a complaint although the School will do what is reasonably practicable to avoid undue delay. It may also take longer to resolve a complaint during periods of significant disruption to School life or as a consequence of unavoidable staff absence, however deviation from the normal timescale for resolving a complaint during term time will only occur on an exceptional basis, and the School will take all reasonable steps to limit any such delay.

### **Persistent Correspondence**

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

### **Recording Complaints and use of personal data**

Following resolution of a complaint, the School will keep a written record of all formal complaints, whether they are resolved at the Stage 1 (informal stage), the formal stage (Stage 2) or proceed to a Panel hearing (Stage 3) and any action taken by the School as a result of the complaint regardless of whether the complaint is upheld.

The School processes data in accordance with its Privacy Notice. When dealing with complaints the School (including any Panel member appointed under the Stage 3 process) may process a range of information, which is likely to include the following:

- 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 and contact details of member (s) of staff handling the issue at each stage
- Copies of all correspondence on the issue (including emails and records of phone conversations)
- Notes/minutes of the hearing, and
- The Panel's written decision

This may include 'special category personal data' as further detailed in the School's Privacy Notice and Data Protection Policy, but potentially including, for instance, information relating to physical or mental health where this is necessary owing to the nature of the complaint. This data will be processed in accordance with the School's Data Protection Policy.

The School will keep records of formal complaints and Complaints Panel hearings, as required by regulation. It will do so in accordance with its Privacy Notice and Data Protection Policy. All records relating to complaints shall be treated as confidential. In addition to where requested by the Secretary of State or an inspector (see above), there may be other circumstances where disclosure of the substance of a complaint or particular confidential records relating to it is required, for example, where there is a legal, regulatory, safeguarding or data protection obligation (e.g., in response to a subject access request) which prevails over the requirement to maintain the records as confidential.

Parents of EYFS students should follow the three stages of this Complaints Procedure. If parents remain dissatisfied and their complaint is about the School's fulfilment of the EYFS requirements, then parents may take their complaint to the ISI. Parents will be notified by ISI of the outcome of the investigation into their complaint within 28 days of the complaint being received.

Frensham Heights will provide ISI, on request, with a written record of all complaints made during any specified period, and the action which was taken as a result of each complaint. The record of any such complaints will be kept in accordance with its Privacy Notice and Retention of Records Policy.

Parents may complain directly to ISI if they believe the provider is not meeting the EYFS requirements. Schools must make available details of how to contact the ISI:

ISI can be contacted on 020 7600 0100 or by email: [concerns@isi.net](mailto:concerns@isi.net) [ISI](#),

[CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA](#)