Complaints Policy

Czech School & Community Manchester

1. Purpose

Czech School & Community Manchester (CSCM, "the Charity" or "we") is committed to providing high-quality educational, cultural and community activities and to treating children, parents and guardians, staff, volunteers, beneficiaries and members of the wider community fairly, respectfully and with dignity.

We welcome feedback about our work. We recognise that, from time to time, a person may be dissatisfied with an aspect of our activities, services or conduct. We take complaints seriously and regard them as an opportunity to address concerns, resolve problems and improve our services and practices.

This policy provides a fair, transparent and proportionate procedure for raising and resolving complaints.

2. Scope

This policy applies to complaints concerning the activities and services provided by Czech School & Community Manchester, including the Czech Saturday School, community activities and events.

- the standard or delivery of a service or activity;
- the conduct or behaviour of a member of staff or volunteer;
- communication with parents, guardians, beneficiaries or members of the community;
- the application of school rules, policies or procedures;
- decisions affecting a child or participant;
- equality, dignity or respectful treatment;
- health and safety arrangements;
- administration or organisation; or
- another aspect of the Charity's activities.

Where possible, concerns should initially be raised informally so that they can be resolved quickly. However, a person has the right to make a formal complaint where the matter is serious, where informal resolution would not be appropriate, or where an informal concern has not been resolved satisfactorily.

3. Matters dealt with under other procedures

Safeguarding and child protection

Any complaint or information indicating that a child may be at risk of harm, or containing an allegation of abuse or inappropriate conduct towards a child, will immediately be dealt with in accordance with CSCM's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy. Safeguarding concerns should not be delayed while the complaints procedure is followed. Where appropriate, the Safeguarding Lead, Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), Children's Social Care, police or another relevant authority may be contacted.

Where a complaint contains both safeguarding and non-safeguarding matters, the safeguarding issues will take priority. The remaining aspects may be considered under this policy when appropriate.

Data protection

Complaints specifically concerning the handling of personal information will be dealt with in accordance with CSCM's Privacy Notice and applicable data protection requirements.

Whistleblowing

Concerns raised by staff or volunteers about wrongdoing, unsafe practices or unacceptable conduct may be dealt with under the whistleblowing provisions contained in CSCM's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy or any separate whistleblowing procedure adopted by the Charity.

Criminal or regulatory matters

If a complaint indicates possible criminal conduct, serious safeguarding concerns or another matter requiring referral to a statutory or regulatory body, CSCM may refer the matter to the appropriate authority. CSCM may suspend or modify its own investigation where continuing it could prejudice an external investigation.

4. Principles

CSCM will seek to ensure that complaints are:

- taken seriously and treated respectfully;
- considered fairly, objectively and without unnecessary delay;
- handled, wherever reasonably possible, by someone who has not been directly involved in the matter complained about;
- treated with appropriate confidentiality;
- investigated proportionately to the nature and seriousness of the complaint;
- recorded appropriately;
- used, where relevant, to identify improvements in the Charity's services or practices; and
- handled without unfair treatment of the person making the complaint.

No child, parent, guardian, beneficiary, volunteer or other person should be disadvantaged merely because they have made a complaint in good faith. All parties are expected to communicate respectfully during the complaints process.

5. How to make a complaint

Suggestions, concerns and complaints should normally be sent by email to enquiries@czechschoolmanchester.org.

A complaint should, where possible, include:

- the complainant's name and contact details;
- a description of what happened and when;
- the name of any person involved, where relevant;
- details of any steps already taken to resolve the matter;
- any relevant documents or other information; and
- what the complainant would like CSCM to do to resolve the matter.

A complainant who has difficulty making a complaint in writing may ask CSCM for reasonable assistance. Complaints may be made on behalf of a child. Children and young people may also raise concerns themselves, and their views will be listened to and considered in a manner appropriate to their age and understanding.

6. Stage 1 – Informal resolution

Where appropriate, concerns should first be raised with the member of staff, teacher, activity organiser or other person responsible for the relevant area. Many concerns arise from misunderstandings or circumstances that can be resolved through explanation, discussion or a practical solution.

If the matter cannot be resolved informally, if the complainant remains dissatisfied, or if the nature of the complaint makes informal resolution inappropriate, the complaint may proceed to Stage 2.

7. Stage 2 – Formal complaint

A formal complaint should normally be submitted to enquiries@czechschoolmanchester.org. Receipt should normally be acknowledged within 5 working days.

The complaint will be allocated to an appropriate person to investigate. Depending on the circumstances, this may be the School Director/Manager, another senior person, or a person appointed by the Charity's trustees.

- The investigator may speak to the complainant, the person complained about and relevant witnesses.
- The investigator may review correspondence, records and other relevant material and seek further information where necessary.
- The person complained about will normally be informed of the substance of the complaint and given a reasonable opportunity to respond, unless safeguarding, legal or other substantial reasons make this inappropriate.

CSCM will aim to provide a written response within 20 working days of acknowledging the formal complaint. If more time is needed, the complainant will be informed of the delay and, where possible, when a response can be expected.

The response should explain what was investigated, the conclusion reached, whether the complaint (or any part) was upheld, any action CSCM proposes to take, and how to request a review. Confidential information concerning another person may be withheld.

8. Stage 3 – Review by the Charity Trustees

If the complainant remains dissatisfied following Stage 2, they may request a review by the charity trustees. A request should normally be made within 15 working days of receiving the Stage 2 decision and should explain why the complaint was not handled properly or why the outcome should be reconsidered.

- whether the complaint was investigated fairly and adequately;
- whether relevant information was considered;
- whether the conclusions were reasonable in light of the available information;
- whether CSCM's relevant policies and procedures were followed; and
- whether any further action is appropriate.

The trustees may appoint one or more trustees to conduct the review on their behalf, subject to the Charity's constitution and any terms of delegation determined by the trustees. No trustee should take part where they have a conflict of interest or where their involvement would create a reasonable concern about impartiality.

CSCM will normally aim to communicate the outcome within 20 working days of acknowledging the review request. The Stage 3 decision represents the end of CSCM's internal complaints procedure.

9. Complaints concerning senior personnel or trustees

Where a complaint concerns the person who would ordinarily investigate it, the complaint will be referred to another suitable person. A complaint concerning a charity trustee should be considered by trustees who are not involved in the complaint and have no relevant conflict of interest.

Where a complaint concerns the Chair, multiple trustees, or circumstances in which the trustees reasonably consider that an internal investigation would not provide sufficient independence, the trustees may appoint an appropriately independent person to investigate or advise on the complaint. All relevant conflicts of interest must be declared and managed in accordance with CSCM's constitution.

10. Confidentiality and data protection

Complaints will be handled with appropriate confidentiality. Information will only be shared with those who need it to consider, investigate, respond to or take appropriate action concerning the complaint, or where disclosure is otherwise required or permitted by law.

A complaint file may contain the identity of the complainant and other people involved. It may be necessary to disclose the complainant's identity, or relevant information supplied by them, to the person complained about in order to investigate fairly.

If a complainant asks for their identity not to be disclosed, CSCM will consider the request carefully and seek to respect it where reasonably possible. However, this may limit CSCM's ability to investigate the complaint, and in some circumstances it may not be possible to investigate anonymously.

Complaint records will be stored securely and retained in accordance with CSCM's Privacy Notice, retention arrangements and applicable data protection requirements. Access will be restricted on a need-to-know basis.

11. Anonymous complaints

Anonymous complaints will be considered on the basis of the information available and the seriousness of the issues raised. CSCM may investigate where there is sufficient information to do so, particularly where safeguarding, safety, serious misconduct or significant risk to the Charity is alleged.

Anonymity may make it difficult or impossible to investigate some complaints fully or to provide an outcome to the complainant.

12. Fairness to everyone involved

A complaint is an allegation or expression of dissatisfaction and will not be treated as proof that wrongdoing has occurred. Anyone who is the subject of a complaint will be treated fairly and given an appropriate opportunity to respond, subject to safeguarding requirements and any external investigation.

Where allegations are not substantiated, CSCM will seek to ensure that individuals are not unfairly disadvantaged as a result.

13. Persistent, unreasonable or abusive behaviour

CSCM is committed to considering legitimate complaints, including complaints made persistently where there are genuinely unresolved issues.

However, CSCM may take proportionate steps to manage contact where a person's behaviour becomes abusive, threatening, discriminatory, harassing or unreasonably persistent, or where substantially the same complaint continues to be raised after the complaints procedure has been completed without significant new information.

Any restriction on communication will be proportionate, documented and, where possible, communicated to the person concerned. It will not prevent CSCM from considering genuinely new concerns, safeguarding information or matters requiring action by law.

14. External complaints

Completion of CSCM's complaints procedure does not prevent a complainant from contacting an appropriate external organisation where they are entitled to do so. Depending on the nature of the complaint, this may include a relevant Local Authority safeguarding service, the police, the Information Commissioner's Office, the Charity Commission or another appropriate regulatory or statutory body.

For data protection concerns, the complainant may contact the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) in accordance with CSCM's Privacy Notice. Safeguarding concerns may be reported directly to the appropriate safeguarding authority where necessary and should not be delayed pending completion of this procedure.

15. Complaints records and monitoring

CSCM will maintain appropriate records of formal complaints, including the nature of the complaint, when it was received, how it was investigated, the outcome, any action taken and whether wider learning or improvement was identified.

Information about complaints may be reviewed by the trustees to identify recurring issues, risks or opportunities to improve the Charity's activities. Any statistics or reports produced about complaints will, wherever appropriate, be anonymised.

Where trustees make decisions concerning significant complaints, those decisions and, where appropriate, the reasons for them will be recorded in accordance with the Charity's governance arrangements.

16. Relationship with other CSCM policies

This policy should be read alongside the Constitution of Czech School and Community Manchester, Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, Privacy Notice, School Rules, and relevant health and safety requirements and procedures.

Where there is any conflict between this policy and CSCM's constitution, the constitution will take precedence.

17. Policy review

The charity trustees are responsible for ensuring that appropriate arrangements are in place for handling complaints. This policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner where there is a significant change in legislation or regulatory guidance, following a serious complaint or incident, or where experience indicates that the procedure should be amended.

Approved by the Charity Trustees of Czech School & Community Manchester

Date: 1 November 2026

Next review date: Autumn Term 2027