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www.straitstimes.com

Published on Apr 16, 2015

# Former RGS student claims she was bullied, sues school

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A FORMER student is suing Raffles Girls' School (RGS), claiming that the school failed to protect her from being bullied and she was forced to study overseas.

Ms Cheryl Tan, now 18, wants RGS to pay not just for her pain and suffering, but also the \$220,000 it cost to continue her studies at the prestigious Wells Cathedral School in England. She is currently completing her A levels there, said her mother, Madam Ng Wee Ching.

A spokesman for RGS, which is denying the claims, told The Straits Times yesterday that the school and its teachers "have always acted in the best interests of its students", and ensured their health and safety within the school.

The case revolves around how Ms Tan fell out with fellow members of the school's Chinese Orchestra in Secondary 3 in 2012.

That year, she was appointed secretary of the co-curricular activity (CCA). According to the suit, she was told by teachers that she would double as a student conductor, along with another student. This allegedly antagonised other CCA members, particularly its student executive committee (exco), which "ostracised and bullied" her at various points over 12 months from July 2012.

According to the suit, Ms Tan was seen as being "selfish" and "greedy" for taking up two positions.

Ms Tan, who joined RGS through the Music Elective Programme, claims that she was repeatedly badgered during practice by a particular student. She says she was also criticised online for bringing up the matter to staff.

She and her parents repeatedly informed the school about the bullying, according to the suit, but the abuse persisted and she left the orchestra in March 2013. She withdrew from the school at the end of July.

It is also claimed that the repeated bullying caused her eczema to worsen and skin on her hand to crack, affecting her ability to play instruments. She needed treatment at KK Women's and Children's Hospital.

In RGS' defence filed with the High Court, its lawyer, Senior Counsel Thio Shen Yi, has described the claims as frivolous.

It was pointed out that school policy defines bullying as involving "hurting, frightening or intimidating others using power of strength" while cyber bullying includes the sending of hateful messages.

The school found no instance of bullying after investigating Ms Tan's complaints. The defence papers pointed out that RGS staff had frequently engaged Ms Tan's parents over their concerns.

The defence also claims that Ms Tan had wanted all along to study overseas and had taken active steps towards this even before the supposed bullying.

Ms Tan, it was pointed out, was never told she was going to be a student conductor. Instead, she was chosen to attend a conducting course with another student. The CCA's teachers-in-charge were considering the possibility of having two student conductors to cope with a larger number of events in 2013.

The CCA's student exco was not told of this however, and on its own, voted for the other student. Ms Tan found out about this and it led to her parents becoming involved. According to the defence, some students in the exco then ended up feeling that the school was only considering a second conductor to give in to Ms Tan's demands.

A High Court pre-trial conference is due today.

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