

Policy Title : **Complaints Management**
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Document ref : **R / 10 / 2466**

Rationale

Grace Christian School encourages open and respectful communication. Complaints will be received in a positive manner, taken seriously and dealt with sensitively, with a view to resolving issues as speedily as possible. At all times the overriding principle will be to treat others with love and respect. The school will endeavour to maintain unity and build genuine relationships within the context of a Christian community.

This policy does not cover complaints, grievances or disputes which should be dealt with under the relevant Grace Christian School Multi-Enterprise Agreement or underlying Awards and Employment Contracts (where relevant). Complaints of Child Abuse and Grooming are dealt with specifically under policies of these titles.

Definitions

- A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem, whether it is about an individual, group, department or school as a whole.
- A complainant may be a parent or guardian, student, member of the public, supplier, contractor or staff member.

Commitment

We are committed to providing an efficient and fair complaint resolution process. We acknowledge the right to complain and welcome feedback in order to help us improve Grace Christian School, and ensure the safety of the students in our care.

Principles

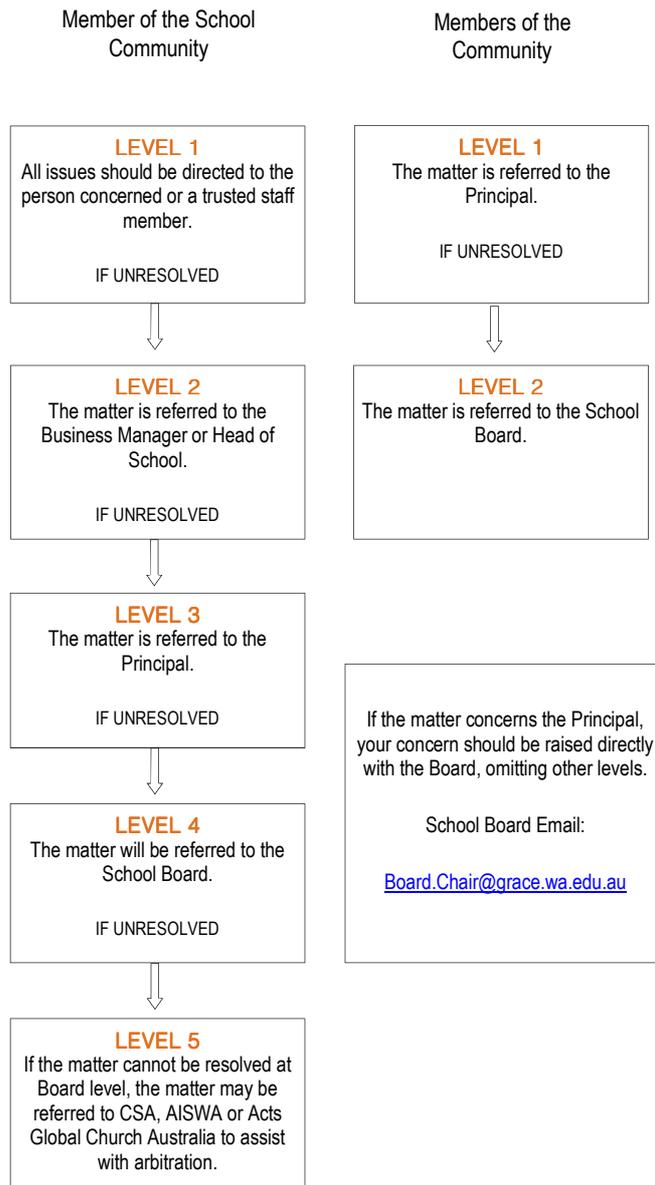
- The School will take complaints from members of its community seriously and the process of making a complaint will be clear, open and accessible to all members of the school community.
- Complaints made by parents should not rebound adversely on their children, and similarly complaints made by pupils or staff should not rebound onto them or onto other pupils or staff.
- All members of staff will be given the opportunity to respond to any complaints that are made against them.
- Every reasonable effort will be made to resolve internal grievances before the intervention of outside agencies or mediators.
- We recognise the importance of fairness in the complaints handling process. To ensure objectivity, the investigation of a complaint against a staff member will not be handled by the staff member whose actions are the subject of the complaint.
- There must be an end to the process at some point. That is, it may be necessary for the complainant to accept that their complaint has been heard and that it cannot be resolved as they would wish it to be.
- Clear confidential notes and records should be kept and a Complaint Register maintained.
- As an organisation responsible for children we will respond to allegations and complaints in the best interest of the children.

Note: If at any time there is a situation involving the Police or a Lawyer, the Principal must take responsibility for the actions of the School. The Board Chair will be contacted as soon as possible and the procedures outlined in this policy will no longer be relevant.

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Implementation

Lines of approach flow chart



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1. Lines of Approach

1.1 Complaints from parents (or guardians)

- Parents should feel free to approach whichever member of staff they believe is the most appropriate to deal with the issue. This may be the Principal or Head of School, although in the first instance the most productive approach would normally be to approach the relevant teacher.
- If the complaint is about a Head of School, the parent would normally go straight to Principal.
- If the complaint is about the Principal, the parent is entitled to contact the Board Chair.
- If the complaint is about the Board, the parent should refer the matter to the Board Chair, who may determine if mediation is required from CSA, AISWA or Acts Global Churches Australia.

1.2 Complaints from students

- Students are entitled to choose an appropriate avenue of complaint. The line of approach for students is clearly outlined in the School's child-friendly complaints process for students. (See child-friendly complaint posters located around school grounds). Refer to item 4 of this policy for details regarding complaints from children.

1.3 Complaints from former students and/or their parents or guardians

- Complaints from former students and/or their guardians are accepted and dealt with in accordance with the standard despite enrolment having ceased.

1.4 Complaints from staff

- Staff members are entitled to choose an appropriate avenue of complaint. This should be a trusted colleague, a senior member of staff, Head of School or the Principal.
- We encourage staff members, where possible, to speak directly to the persons involved. Staff may choose to seek the support of a colleague or talk to their line manager for help in resolving a complaint or may choose to use an alternative medium such as email.

1.5 Mandatory Reporting

- Submissions of complaints which fall within the area of child protection should follow the requirements of the School's Child Protection Policies and the Children and Community Services Amendment (Reporting Sexual Abuse of Children) Act 2008.
- Refer : R/08/1050 Child Abuse and Neglect Policy; R/12/1915 Mandatory Reporting of Sexual Abuse Policy; R/19/2087 Grooming Policy

1.6 Complaints from the public

- These should be referred to the Principal, Business Manager or Board Chair and may be submitted via a variety of media including the website.

2. Procedures

2.1 Managing Complaints

In many instances, staff will be the first point of contact for a complaint, especially from parents and students. All staff members are encouraged to deal with complaints that lie within their area of responsibility. In dealing with complaints, staff should:

- Keep a written record of the concern or complaint and how the matter was resolved or is being dealt with (see Section 3, below);
- Let the complainant know what will be done in response to their complaint, and when they will do it;

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- Maintain confidentiality and respect the concern that many complainants have that their complaint will rebound adversely on themselves or on their children or friends;
- Ensure that a senior member of staff, e.g. Head of Learning Area, the Business Manager, a Head of School or the Principal is aware of the complaint and of its proposed resolution.

2.2 When Complaints become Grievances

In the first instance it is hoped that the complaint will be resolved through open and respectful communication. However, there will be occasions when grievances develop, or the complaints are of such a serious nature that more formal action needs to be taken. The complainant will be permitted to bring a support person with him/her at any stage of the process. In the case of a student, this may be a friend, parent or trusted adult.

Alternative action includes:

a. Referral to an outside agency

There could be instances in which the Principal, in consultation with the Board Chair, refers the complaint to an outside agency e.g. the Police or CPFS.

b. Referral to the Board Chair

In most cases, the Principal refers the matter to the Board Chair and informs the complainant that this stage has been reached. However, the complainant will also be able to write directly to the Board Chair.

The Board Chair will discuss the matter with the Principal and be provided with relevant documentation. If a briefing is required from a member of staff or another person, this will occur in the presence of the Principal.

The Board Chair will respond to the complainant, notifying him/her that the matter is being reviewed, asking him/her if they wish to add anything further and providing a date by which they may expect a written response.

The Board Chair's response will be clear and detailed, and will offer a meeting if the complainant remains troubled.

c. Meeting with the Board Chair

If a meeting is requested, the Board Chair will offer to meet the complainant. The meeting will include the Board Chair; the Principal and the complainant.

If a solution is not found, the Board Chair may consider referring the matter to CSA, AISWA or Acts Global Churches Australia for mediation.

d. Referral to a mediator

It must be noted that referral to the mediator should not be resorted to until all internal procedures have been exhausted.

Referral to the mediator would normally be through the School Board. All parties will participate fully and openly in this process and determination made under this process will be final.

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3. Records

If a complaint is dealt with in the Principal's Office, Head of School or at Board level, confidential records are kept in that office and copies are placed in the relevant student file in SEQTA or staff file in TRIM. However, many concerns and complaints are resolved before they come to the Principal. Staff members keep records of all communication with parents/carers, especially if it is more than a quick conversation. Such records are stored electronically on the student profile in SEQTA.

4. Child-friendly complaints

Considerations (with reference to "Are you listening?: Guidelines for making complaints systems accessible and responsive to children and young people", WA Commissioner for Children and Young People, June 2013).

- Students are integral members of our community and should be acknowledged as such and encouraged to have open and honest conversations regarding matters of concern or complaints;
- Students must be given opportunities to raise concerns, give feedback and discuss experiences;
- Students are provided with a variety of choices to make complaints including face to face;
- The complaint process is outlined in publications which are developmentally suitable and appealing;
- The school allows advocates to complain on behalf of the student and when that occurs, makes sure the student can participate directly to the extent they wish;
- Student complaints as with all others will be dealt with promptly;
- Specific training for staff who may deal with student complaints will be included in professional training days/ opportunities;
- Understanding, helpfulness and responsiveness is demonstrated toward students complaints;
- Students understanding about the complaint process is checked and reinforced where necessary;
- The identity of the complainant is required to be kept confidential, particularly in relation to child protection matters, except in limited circumstances;
- Maintaining confidentiality and obtaining student consent in relation to complaints should be given appropriate priority depending on the nature of the complaint;
- Victimisation of students for making an allegation or complaint in accordance with school's policies is forbidden, including where the allegation is unfounded.
- The school will conduct an audit of the child friendly complaint system biennially, simultaneous with the review of this policy. The review process is guided by the Commissioner for Young People WA document "Are you listening?; Guidelines for making complaints system accessible and responsive to children and young people" page 10 and 11. (*Refer R/19/2156) – Assessing and Improving Complaints Audit document.*)

5. Anonymous complaints

Anonymous complaints may be where there is no indication of either name or address, or where the complainants say they do not wish to be identified. They may come from members of the public, from parents or from students.

Parents and students should be encouraged to give their names and should be given reassurance of the issue being dealt with discretely. If they persist in wishing to remain anonymous, it is at the Principal's discretion as to what action should be taken, depending on the nature of the complaint.

Anonymous complaints will be recorded in the Complaints Register managed by the Principal's Assistant.

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6. School's response

- A request should be made for any complaint to be made in writing (where appropriate). In order to support our child-friendly complaints process, students may make their complaint verbally or in any form they are comfortable with. It is important the school ascertains all the relevant information, particularly if the nature of the concern is not clear. All staff should request complicated / convoluted complaints be submitted in writing.
- Complaints should be acknowledged within 5 working days. The issue should be dealt with as quickly as possible and the person raising the concern informed of the outcome in a timely manner.
- Complaints raised verbally will generally be responded to verbally, although every effort should be made to have the complaint expressed in writing.
- Complaints raised in writing will be responded to accordingly.

7. Complaint Register

- The School will maintain a Complaints Management Register. Complaints or allegations raised at a Head of School, Principal or Board level will be recorded and allocated a reference number. The Register will be reviewed regularly by the Principal and Heads of School; a minimum of once per term to identify any patterns or identify any areas of concern. The Register should contain the following information:
 - Register number;
 - Date when the complaint or allegation was raised;
 - Name of person raising the complaint;
 - Category of the complaint to assist in identifying patterns.
 - Brief description of complaint;
 - Member of staff handling the complaint;
 - Date a resolution reached;
 - Location of detailed file in TRIM;
 - SEQTA entry where applicable.

8. SEQTA

Matters of concern and complaints relating to student conduct, conversations with parents and student management strategies are recorded on the students' profiles in SEQTA. Heads of School regularly check student profiles, and respond appropriately to patterns/trends.

Refer to:

- "Who to talk to when you have a complaint or suggestion" brochure
- Child-friendly Complaint Process

Attachments:

- R/19/2156 - Assessing and Improving Complaints Audit Document

Review and Responsibility			
Policy written by:	Hugo de Ridder (Principal)	Date Accepted:	26/05/2015
Review Period:	Biennially	Last Review:	26/06/2019 by the Principal