

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

Rationale

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.

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 the Child Protection Policy. (Ref. R/12/1915)

Definitions

- A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem.
- A complainant may be a parent or guardian, student, member of the public, supplier, contractor or staff member.

Principles

- We will always respond to allegations and complaints in the best interest of the children.
- The complaint process will be clear, open and accessible to all members of the school community and the public.
- We recognise the importance of fairness in the complaints handling process, ensuring a hearing is appropriate to the circumstances, is free of bias and will ensure sufficient evidence supports the decision making process.
- To ensure objectivity, any complaint against a staff member will not be handled by the staff member whose actions are the subject of the complaint.
- We will ensure reporting, privacy and employment law obligations are adhered to.
- 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.
- Every reasonable effort will be made to resolve internal grievances before the intervention of outside agencies or mediators.
- Complaints made should not rebound adversely on the complainant or their family members. (Ref. R/24/2838 - Whistleblower Policy)
- All members of staff will be given the opportunity to respond to any complaints that are made against them.
- A Complaint Register will be maintained and clear confidential notes and records should be kept.

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.

Implementation

1. Lines of Approach

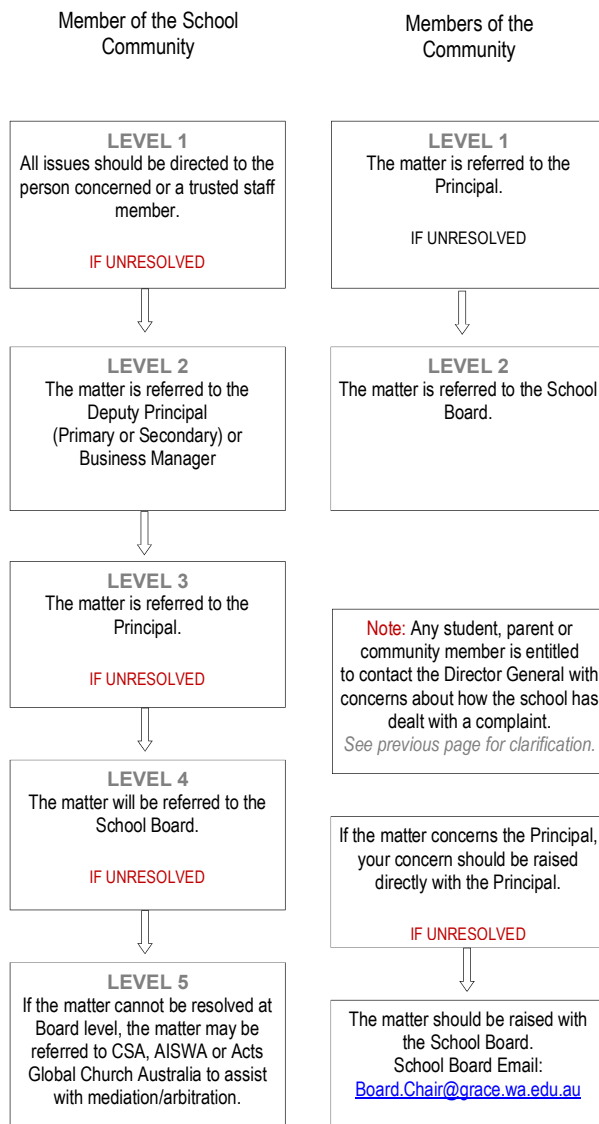
1.1 Complaints from parents (or guardians)

- Parents should feel free to approach the most appropriate staff member to deal with the issue. This may be the Principal or Deputy Principal (Primary/Secondary), although in the first instance the most rational approach would be to approach the person concerned.
- If the complaint is about a Deputy Principal, 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.

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- Complainants are entitled to contact the Director General (DG) with concerns about how the school has dealt with a complaint. Information is available on the Department of Education’s website. While the DG may consider whether the school has breached the registration standards, they do not have the power to intervene or override the school’s decision.

Lines of approach flow chart



1.2 Complaints from Students

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- 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 this policy 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, Deputy Principal (Primary or Secondary) 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, talk to their line manager for help in resolving their concern, or may choose to use an alternative such as an email to staffconcerns@grace.wa.edu.au or place a written note in the staff suggestion box, located in the staffroom.

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/12/1915 Child Protection Policy (Mandatory Reporting)

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 platforms, including the website.

2. Procedures

2.1 Managing Complaints

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;
- Maintain confidentiality and respect the concern 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, a Deputy Principal or the Principal is aware of the complaint and of its proposed resolution.

2.2 When Complaints become Grievances

Our aim is to resolve issues through open and respectful communication. However, there will be occasions when grievances develop, or the complaints are of such a serious nature that alternative actions must be taken. The complainant will be permitted to bring a support person with them at any stage of the process. In the case of a student, this may be a friend, parent or trusted adult.

Alternative action includes:

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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 them that the matter is being reviewed, asking them 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/arbitration.

d. Referral to a mediator

It must be noted that referral to the mediator should not be resorted to until all internal options are 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.

e. The Director General of the Department of Education is responsible for ensuring that the school observes the registration standards, including the standard about its complaints handling system.

Any student, parent or community member is entitled to contact the Director General with concerns about how the school has dealt with a complaint.

Information is available on the Department of Education website. While the Director General may consider whether the school has breached the registration standards, they do not have power to intervene in a complaint or override the school's decision.

3. Records

If a complaint is dealt with in the Principal's Office, the Deputy Principal's Office (Primary or Secondary) or at Board level, confidential records are kept in the 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

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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 student 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.

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.

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- 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 Deputy Principal, Principal or Board level will be recorded and allocated a reference number. The Register will be reviewed regularly by the Principal and Deputy Principals; 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 Student Management regularly check student profiles, and respond appropriately to patterns/trends.

9. Regular audits will be conducted with the aim of improving the complaints process. (Ref. R/19/2156)

Refer to:

- R/21/2880 "Who to talk to when you have a complaint or concern" brochure
- R/19/1527/28 K-2 & 3-12 Child-friendly Complaint Process
- R/24/2838 Whistleblowers Policy
- R/12/1915 Child Protection Policy

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: 07/03/2024 by the Principal