



POLICY AND PROCEDURE FOR HANDLING PARENT COMPLAINTS

PURPOSE

It is recognised that, from time to time, complaints may be received by the School from parents (including guardians and any person with whom a student normally or regularly resides) in our community. This policy sets out guidelines and processes by which such matters can be addressed respectfully, fairly, in a non-adversarial manner, expeditiously and with sensitivity to all concerned.

The policy and procedures which follow seek to provide for the resolution of complaints by parents. For the purposes of this policy a 'complaint' can arise if a parent believes, in good faith and with supporting information, that the School has, for example:

- done something wrong
- failed to do something that it should have done
- acted unfairly, unreasonably, inappropriately or unprofessionally.

SCOPE

This policy and procedure applies for all parents and guardians of students enrolled at Westminster School and for Westminster School staff who may be managing or otherwise impacted by complaints received by the School.

This policy and procedure do not address complaints relating to staff employment matters or grievances. These are managed through appropriate statutory and Enterprise Agreement provisions and the School's Workplace Complaints Policy.

POLICY

Westminster School is committed to:

1. In partnership with parents, delivering education and care of the highest quality.
2. Ensuring that the School is a safe and fair place in which to work and study.
3. Actively promoting the development of positive and respectful relationships and seeking to minimise the incidence of conflict that might otherwise give rise to a complaint.
4. Encouraging, wherever possible, the resolution of complaints, if and when they arise, at the school level.
5. Supporting the right of parents to have their complaints listened to, taken seriously, in good faith and to be addressed and resolved fairly, reasonably and expeditiously.
6. Complying with all relevant statutory and legal requirements. These include for example, but are not limited to: anti-discrimination and vilification laws, child protection laws and Family Court orders.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Parents are entitled to lodge a bona fide complaint with the School. This means that complaints should be lodged in good faith and without frivolous, malicious or vexatious intent.
2. Every reasonable effort will be made by the School and its representatives to ensure that a parent who lodges a complaint or anyone dealing with or involved in the complaint will not be treated unfairly, victimised, coerced or intimidated.



3. Communication and resolution processes should always be based on the parties acting in good faith, exercising good judgement, being honest and open, and focusing on the issue and not the person(s).
4. Each complaint is to be dealt with on its particular circumstances and merits and any settlements reached or determinations made through the resolution process will not necessarily constitute any binding precedent for future or similar cases.
5. In responding to a complaint, informally or formally, every reasonable effort shall be made to ensure that natural justice and procedural fairness are afforded to all parties. This means, in practical terms, that:
 - a. All parties are entitled to be treated with respect and to be heard.
 - b. All parties should participate fully in the resolution process to achieve an outcome that is realistic and reasonable.
 - c. A person who is the subject of a complaint should be informed of the substance thereof and given a full opportunity to present their perspective.
 - d. All parties have a right to seek advice and support.
 - e. Investigations and proceedings must be conducted fairly, thoroughly and without bias or undue delay.
 - f. Parties should provide all relevant, material, complete and factual information, documents or other evidence relating to the complaint.

PROCEDURE

A. Informal resolution of complaints wherever possible

1. Many concerns and complaints may be minor in nature, or readily resolved, and often arise from genuine misunderstandings and/or issues relating to communication. In the vast majority of cases, these can be satisfactorily resolved informally.
2. The School encourages and supports complainants, wherever possible and as soon as practicable after a matter becomes of concern, to seek to resolve a complaint in an informal and amicable manner. This is best done through direct communication/discussion by and between the parties themselves (e.g. a parent and teacher).
3. Formal procedures for the resolution of complaints should only be invoked when a matter is of a very serious nature and/or cannot be resolved by the parties themselves through informal means.

B. Formal and serious complaints

1. Complaints that cannot otherwise be resolved informally as above or are of a serious nature may be formally referred in writing to the appropriate staff:

Senior School

- a. Curriculum Leader of the appropriate teaching faculty
- b. Head of House (Years 9 to 12), Head of Year 8 (Year 8 students)
- c. Head of Senior School or Director of Learning
- d. Principal



Preparatory School

- a. Deputy of Junior Primary, Middle Primary or Upper Primary
- b. Head of Preparatory School
- c. Principal

Cross-School / other services

- a. Director of Corporate Services
 - b. Head of Activities
 - c. Director of Boarding
2. In such instances, a parent may also seek advice or clarification from any of the aforementioned staff about the appropriate person(s) in the School to whom the complaint might best be directed.
 3. As a general guide, complaints should be directed to the person with direct management oversight of the issues of concern. Concerns or complaints that are lodged with the Principal or Heads of School may be directed by them to the appropriate manager for handling.
 4. As soon as practicable after a formal written complaint has been lodged, a process will be initiated by the School to investigate the complaint.
 5. The School may, at its discretion, determine the nature of investigation that is warranted.
 6. The investigative process in relation to a formal complaint may include but not necessarily be limited to: gathering relevant and material information relating to the complaint, meetings convened of the parties to discuss the complaint and to seek a resolution, and the use of an impartial or external investigator / mediator. If a resolution can't be found, a determination will be made by the School, based on thorough investigation, as to whether or not to uphold the complaint.
 7. If the complaint is substantiated, the evidence is inconclusive or if the complaint is found to not be substantiated, all parties will be formally advised accordingly, along with any follow-up counselling or other actions as the parties agree and/or the School deems appropriate and necessary in all the circumstances.

C. Referral of a complaint to School Council

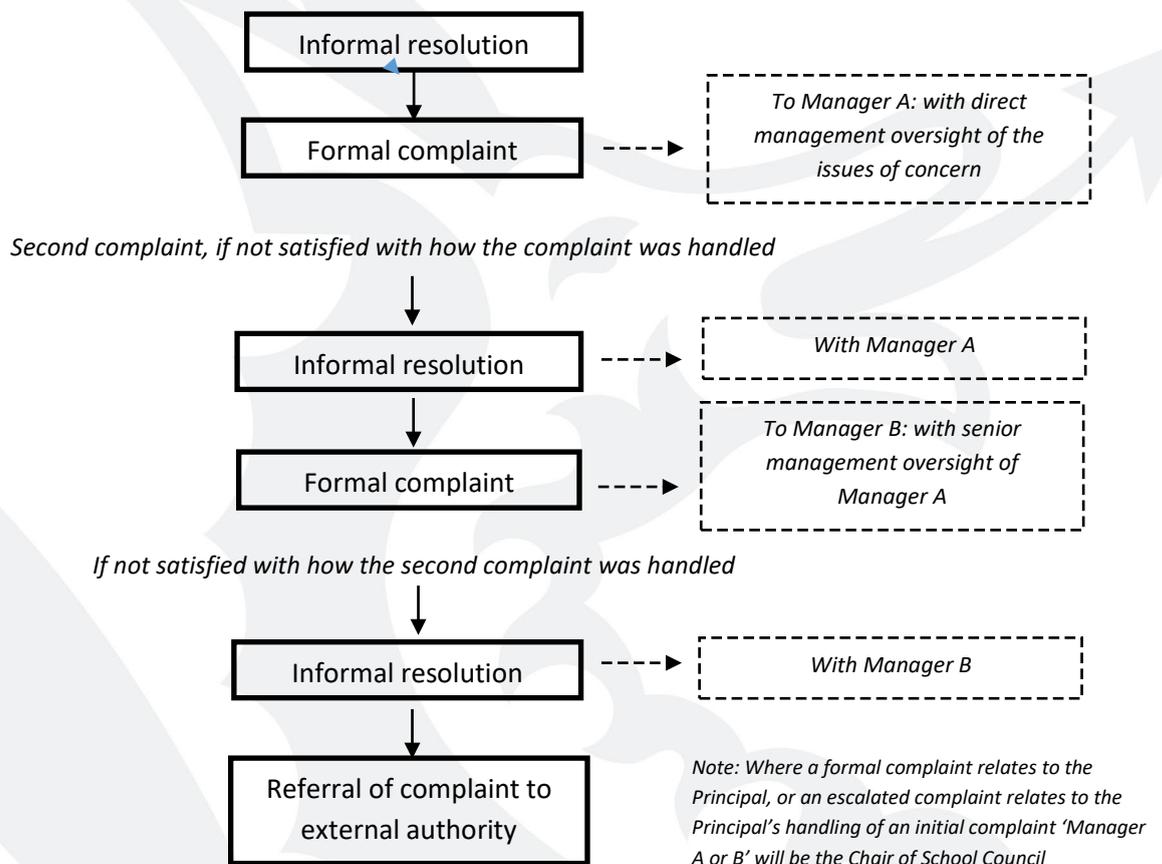
1. School Council is not to be involved in the receipt, investigation or resolution of complaints unless as C2 and C3 below.
2. In instances where a complaint is about the Principal, a person may, if they feel the matter cannot otherwise be resolved or feels it is appropriate to do so, lodge a formal complaint with the Chair of School Council. In turn, and in consultation with the Complainant, the Chair of School Council will expeditiously take all reasonable steps to have the complaint fully investigated and to facilitate a resolution.
3. Complaints specific to the governance role of School Council or the conduct of Council members should be lodged with the Chair of School Council.

D. Referral of a complaint to an external authority

1. When a complaint is not or cannot be resolved within the School, the parties may seek the assistance of external professional agencies or other relevant judicial or quasi-judicial bodies in order that a further attempt can be made to resolve the matter. This is subject to the following important provisions:

- a. The Association of Independent Schools of South Australia (AISSA) will not act as a mediator between parents and schools but if a matter remains unresolved, or parents feel that the school has failed to take their complaint seriously, AISSA may be able to provide general assistance to help parents understand the School's position.
- b. Neither the South Australian Minister for Education and Child Development nor the Department for Education and Child Development has any power or authority over the day to day operation of independent schools and therefore will not receive or consider any referral of a complaint regarding Westminster School.

E. Summary of escalation steps



In normal circumstances, the School

- will reinvestigate escalated issues of concern only where there are substantiated concerns about the process that was used to handle the complaint; and
- will not reinvestigate solely on the grounds that a complainant disagrees with the outcome.

F. Confidentiality, Discretion, and the School's duty or obligation to notify or report

1. If a parent chooses to make a complaint without disclosing their identity, this will limit the options for proper and thorough investigation and resolution. It also raises issues in relation to procedural fairness for those who



have a complaint made about them as they have a right to know the particulars of the complaint and to respond. The School therefore cannot guarantee that anonymous complaints can or will be dealt with. Complainants are always encouraged to identify themselves.

2. As far as possible and appropriate, due discretion will be respected and maintained by all parties throughout the resolution process, save where persons are required to be informed on a 'need to know' basis or where investigative, statutory or legal requirements stipulate that matters be disclosed, reported or discussed. Therefore, there can be no overriding legal obligation or right with respect to confidentiality.
3. Where complaints are made in circumstances where an alleged crime may have been committed or the matter falls under the Reporting Abuse and Neglect provisions, the Police or similar outside agencies (e.g. Child Abuse Report Line) will be contacted and formally advised

G. Withdrawal of a complaint

1. A parent may withdraw a complaint at any stage of the resolution process. If a complaint is withdrawn, the matter will be deemed to be closed, unless the School, at its discretion and in all the circumstances, wishes to continue to address a matter raised.

H. Record keeping by the School

1. Accurate, appropriate and secure records of all formal complaints submitted in writing will be kept at the School by the person(s) responsible for overseeing or managing the resolution process for a particular complaint, and logged on the School's Complaints Register. The Complaints Register is kept and managed by the Principal's Executive Assistant.

I. Distribution of this Policy

1. This Policy, and any changes or updates thereto, is made available to all staff and parents of the School.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Privacy Policy

Policy Title	Policy and Procedure for Managing Parent Complaints
Policy Number	WS-Pol-01
Version Number	4 (minor updates)
Approved By	School Council
Date Issued	October 2018