



# Managing and Recording Complaints

Ratified by Council	
Date	
Name	
Signature	

<b>Provenance</b>	<b>To be Revised (Date)</b>	
	<b>Related to Standard</b>	11. Complaints Management
	<b>Related Documents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communications Protocol</li> <li>• Staff Professional Code of Conduct</li> </ul>
	<b>Links with</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student Concerns and Complaints</li> </ul>
	<b>Appendix</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appendix 1 – Flow Chart, Grievance &amp; Resolution Policy</li> <li>• Appendix 2 – Grievance or Concern Report Form</li> </ul>

## Overview

At West Coast Steiner School, we acknowledge that differences of opinion, understanding and feelings inevitably arise in human relationships, including in schools. We strive to deal with these in a way which is helpful for all those who are involved. This applies equally to staff members, parents and students. We understand that each situation is different, and these are guidelines to assist with resolution.

## Policy

West Coast Steiner School is committed to providing a supportive working and community environment. The school values direct communication between individuals and expects that individuals will bring concerns directly to the parties involved. All reasonable efforts will be made by all parties to resolve the issue using the appropriate internal school processes in a sensitive and timely manner.

### Definition

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction and may be made when it is felt that someone has:

- Done something wrong;
- Failed to do something s/he should have done; or
- Acted unfairly or impolitely.

A complaint may be made about the school as a whole, about a specific department, about a specific school activity, about an individual member of staff or about one or more students.

Regardless, every complaint and concern are taken seriously and treated as constructive suggestions that can facilitate improvement. Even complaints that are deemed 'unjustified' can indicate an area that can be improved on.

## Process

### Communication Difficulties, Conflicts and Grievances

We urge everyone to try to address any misunderstandings, poor communication or other incidents directly with the person involved, whether teacher, another staff member or someone else in the school community.

The Complaints Officer is either, according to the circumstances, the School Administrator, the Coordinator of Curriculum and Teaching or the Chair of Council (in case the complaint concerns one of the above, or as a point of escalation of complaints).

It is the school's responsibility to make the policy available to all parents and staff members by:

- Including it on the school website;
- Including it in both the Staff and Parent Handbooks.

## Guidelines for Handling of Complaints/Concerns

- Complaints and concerns are always treated seriously and confidentially.
- Once a complaint is made, the complainant will receive written acknowledgement of the complaint.
- The Complaints Officer will examine and investigate the complaint and will take action to resolve the complaint within 5 working days after receiving the complaint. Generally speaking, the complaint will be dealt with as soon as possible. If the complaint/concern is complex in nature, a date by which a detailed response will be received is provided.
- All parties involved with or impacted by the complaint will be treated with procedural fairness and respect. Procedural fairness involves lack of bias, evidence to support decisions, inquiry into matters of dispute and a hearing appropriate to the circumstances.
- Complaints made by parents will not adversely impact their children.
- The substance of the complaint is provided to the subject of the complaint.
- Where appropriate, and where complaints/concerns are of a serious nature, the Chair of Council will be informed about the nature of the complaint.
- Action that is being taken by the Complaints Officer is communicated to the complainant.
- Clear record is kept of the complaint, including the actions taken and the outcome.
- A third party, where necessary/appropriate, will be involved to mediate and/or act as independent arbiter. The Complainant can invite a third person into the meeting(s) for additional support.
- Where required, depending on the nature of the complaint, a referral will be made to an external authority such as an AISWA representative (Legal representative) Child Protection or the Western Australian Police Force for advice or immediate action.

- Actions in relation to the complaint are evaluated and procedures reviewed.

## Procedures

- A grievance should initially always be taken to the person involved directly. Parents should always take any concern related to your child or children to the teacher.
- If a conflict or grievance cannot be resolved directly with the person concerned, then contact the School Administrator or the Coordinator of Curriculum and Teaching, according to the nature of the complaint. In the event that the School Administrator is the subject of the complaint, then the College Chair or Council chair should be contacted; if the Curriculum of Curriculum and Teaching, then the School Administrator should be contacted. This contact person is also referred to as the 'Complaints Officer' herein.
- When a complaint is put in writing the complaint should be based on an identifiable instance or instances and record factual information. The Complaints Officer will contact the complainant as a matter of priority within two days to respond to the concerns and explain how it might proceed.
- If appropriate, the person who is the subject of the complaint is advised of the complaint and invited to submit their own account of the incident/s to the Complaints Officer.
- A meeting is held to explore the incident/s with both parties facilitated by the Complaints Officer.
- In the same meeting or in a further meeting, options for action are explored and agreement is reached upon those actions which need to be implemented.
- This process may extend beyond one meeting and may be more or less formal depending on the situation and events under discussion.
- If any action requires sanctioning from the College of Teachers, then ratification is sought from the appropriate body.
- Action/s are implemented and followed up as agreed by parties involved in the mediated meeting.
- Where an aspect of a grievance includes an issue about a staff member's professional performance or conduct, the issue will be referred to the Coordinator of Curriculum and Teaching and School Administrator. If required, support will be offered to the staff member to explore these issues and to address any concerns through professional development, mentorship or by agreement.

- If problems still remain, the complainant can ask (in writing addressed to the school Council Secretary) for the matter to be referred to the School Council. In this situation further, professional assistance may be sought.

### **Exceptions**

When the nature of the complaint concerns issues of safety for themselves or a child or if the same issue has been the subject of an earlier complaint and one party has failed to keep their commitment/s then the complainant should bring the matter to the attention of the School Administrator as a matter of urgency.

## **Process for the Complaints Officer**

Upon receiving a complaint or grievance, the Complaints Officer asks the complainant whether they have spoken to the person concerned. The Complaints Officer will take a statement from the complainant and advise them that they will also go to the person about whom they are making a complaint. They will then organise a meeting with the complainant and the party involved.

### **Recommended Process**

#### **Stage One**

At the first meeting (or part of the meeting), the parties will be asked to share their experiences of the incident/s which led to the complaint. Each party will be encouraged to listen to the other and to reflect back on the experiences of the other person.

The role of the Complaints Officer will be to act as a facilitator for this conversation, to ensure that each party has the opportunity to tell their story and to be heard. This meeting is to explore the nature of the complaint from the perspective of all those involved and develop the possibility of mutual understanding. At the end of this meeting, or part of the meeting, the two parties will organise to meet again, if needed, to determine any actions which are required.

When doing so, it is helpful for both parties to express the specific nature of the incident which led to the grievance, their feelings about it and what it led them to do or not do. It is helpful for both parties to listen respectfully, and to reflect back the perspective of the other person involved.

This will include:

- Third party, if present acts as moral support and does not contribute
- Agreement on the process of the meeting(s);
- Respectful listening with attention to gesture, body language, tone of voice;
- Respectful speaking, avoidance of loaded comments, name-calling, labelling;
- Discussion of incident/s and the feelings, thoughts and experiences they aroused, with each Participant taking turns to speak about their own experience;
- Reflection back where each participant reflects back on the other participant's experience of the event;
- Summary and review.

### **Stage Two**

A second meeting (or a second part of the same meeting) will usually be held to determine any changes or actions which may need to occur. The Complaints Officer will act as a mediator. At this meeting, options will be explored to resolve the issues under discussion. Each party must be able to ensure that any options can be acted upon. This meeting is focused on the future. Participants will be encouraged to explore options and reach agreement on what may be acted upon and what may not.

- Exploring the issues involved.
- Developing/Generating options.
- Negotiation and testing of options.
- Decision making.
- Agreement and review.

At the end of the second meeting, all participants should be clear about what has been agreed upon for the future. This agreement may include changes in behaviour from either or both party/ies, regular spoken or written communication, shared activities, and for whatever options have been agreed upon as necessary.

The Complaints Officer or another person may be asked to provide support to either or both parties to assist the agreement.

### **Stage 3**

In the event that the parties involved require or request further assistance to resolve an issue, we recommend the mediation services provided by the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (AISWA) or a similar independent body.

### **Stage 4**

Any documentation generated during this process will be kept for 2 years in a folder labelled "Complaints" and stored in a locked filing cabinet in the office.

## Resolution of Complaints

Resolution of a complaint may come from any of the following:

- Knowing that changes have been made and that matters will be different in the future;
- Knowing that the school is now alert to a possible problem;
- Feeling that the concern has been considered seriously;
- An outcome which may be different to what was sought, but which is perceived as well-considered and fair;
- A considered letter;
- An apology.

It should be noted that the complainants often do not receive explicit information on what action has been taken. This is especially important when the complaint is related to another student, or a staff member.

## Recording of Complaints

### When a complaint is lodged with the Complaints Officer

When a complaint is lodged with the complaints officer, being either the School Administrator, the Coordinator of Curriculum and Teaching, or the Chair of Council (in case the complaint involves the School Administrator or as an escalation point) the complaint is recorded in a Complaint and Concern Form.

### Recording of Complaints/Concerns in Complaints Register

After recording the complaint in a Complaint and Concern Form, the Complaints Officer records an anonymized description of the complaint in a complaints and concerns Register. The Complaints Register records a range of relevant information, including:

- Date when the issue was raised and to whom it was raised;
- Name of complainant and relevant parties involved;
- Brief statement of the issue;
- Member of staff handling the issue;
- Name of person/member of staff reviewing the any decisions made;
- Brief statement of outcome including date of resolution/outcome;
- Location of detailed file (if complaint has not been resolved yet).

### Complaints Register and at Council

Every 2 months the Complaints Register is discussed at a Council meeting. Council will discuss the nature of complaints/concerns, work to discover patterns as well as probe the handling of complaints.

### Once a Complaint Has Been Resolved

- Records concerning students will be kept for 7 years after graduation from WCSS Primary school.



- All relevant information is sealed in an envelope which is kept in the Complaints folder in a locked cabinet for the duration of the parents' children's enrolment at school.
- The Complaints Register will note that the Complaint has been resolved. General, anonymized information regarding the concern will remain in the register.

A brief unbiased reference is to be added to the personnel file to the effect that:

- a. Complaint was made;
- b. Complaint was addressed/resolved;
- c. Any further details are stored in a sealed envelope in Complaints Folder.

### **Confidentiality**

The School appreciates that personal issues must be kept confidential. Confidentiality will be maintained by the relevant staff member/s at all levels of the process.

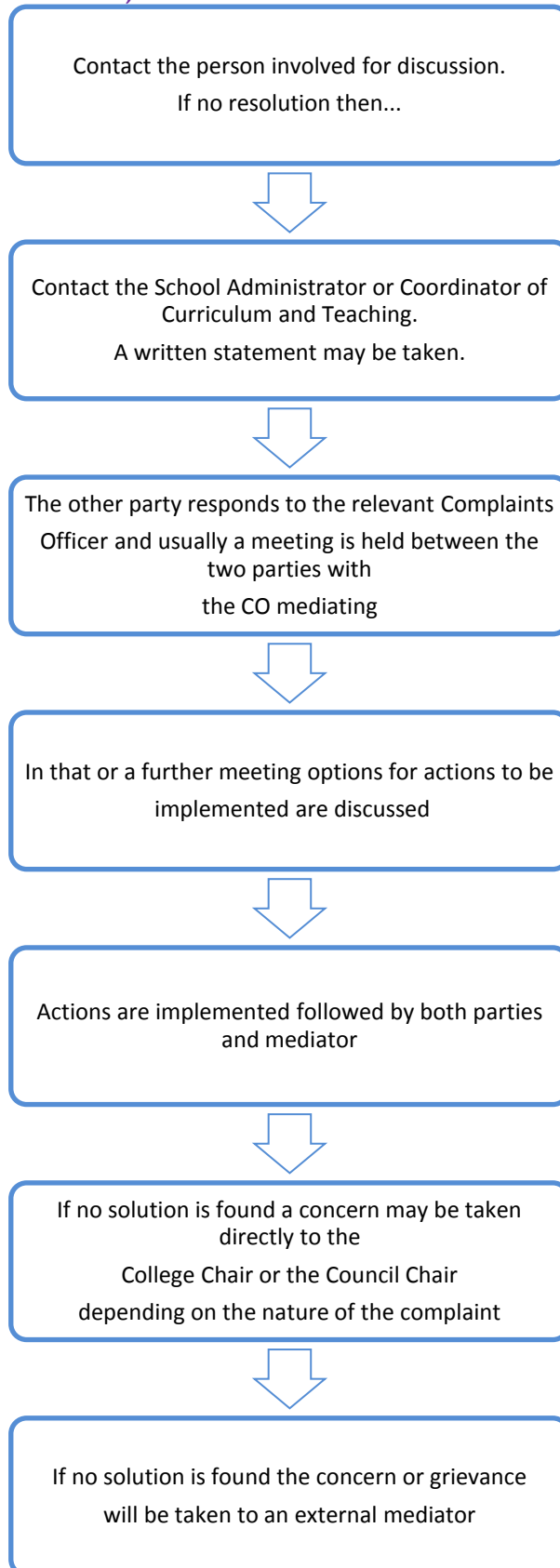
## **Training**

Bi-annual training is provided to ensure that staff:

- understands the Managing and Recording Complaints Policy and Procedure;
- is skilled in communication skills, such as listening, questioning, calming and mediation;
- is skilled in observing, recording and reporting;
- understands the benefit of handling complaints well and the consequences of handling them badly.

# Appendix One

## Flow Chart, Grievance and Resolution Policy





## Complaint or Concern Report Form

All concerns, large or small, are important pieces of information for the school and we welcome knowing about them and using them to help in improving the running of the school. All members of the school community are obliged to follow these procedures. Once completed place in the School Administrator or Coordinator of Curriculum and Teaching tray in the office or return the form by mail, marked PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL.

Please do not email this form.

Concerns will be processed in accordance with the Grievance Resolution Policy.

**PLEASE INDICATE THE LEVEL OF CONCERN TO YOU (circle): MINOR MIDDLE MAJOR**

Date of incident \_\_\_\_\_

Name of person filling in this form \_\_\_\_\_

Contact phone number \_\_\_\_\_

Person filling in this form is a (please circle) :

Staff member

Parent/ Legal Guardian

School visitor

Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

Brief description of concern:

Any evidence to support the concern:

What you would like to see happen:

*Thank you for filling out this form. You will be contacted by the Complaints Officer who will let you know how your concern is being addressed.*

West Coast Steiner School, 15 Mayfair Street Nollamara 6061.

# Appendix Two

## Ombudsman Western Australia

### The Principles of Effective Complaint Handling

#### **Step 1 - Enabling Complaints**

Customer Focus  
Visibility  
Accessibility

#### **Step 2 - Responding to Complaints**

Confidentiality  
Responsiveness  
Objectivity & Fairness  
Remedy  
Review

#### **Step 3 - Accountability and Learning**

Accountability  
Continuous Improvement.

The key features of an effective complaint handling system can be organised according to ten principles.

These principles form the three steps of complaint handling:

- Enabling complaints - arrangements that enable people to make complaints to organisations;
- Responding to complaints - ensuring that complaints are dealt with in a prompt, objective and confidential manner; and
- Accountability and Learning - using complaints to demonstrate accountability and stimulate organisational improvement.

## The Principles of Effective Complaint Handling

1. **Customer focus** – the organisation is committed to effective complaint handling and values feedback through complaints;
2. **Visibility** – information about how and where to complain is well publicised to customers, staff and other interested parties;
3. **Accessibility** – the process for making a complaint and investigating it is easy for complainants to access and understand;
4. **Responsiveness** – complaints are acknowledged promptly, addressed according to urgency, and the complainant is kept informed throughout the process;
5. **Objectivity and fairness** – complaints are dealt with in an equitable, objective and unbiased manner. This will help ensure that the complaint handling process is fair and reasonable. Unreasonable complainants are not allowed to become a burden;
6. **Confidentiality** – personal information related to complaints is kept confidential;
7. **Remedy** – if a complaint is upheld, the organisation provides a remedy;
8. **Review** – there are opportunities for internal and external review and/or appeal about the organisation's response to the complaint, and complainants are informed about these avenues;
9. **Accountability** – accountabilities for complaint handling are clearly established, and complaints and responses to them are monitored and reported to management and other stakeholders;
10. **Continuous Improvement** – complaints are a source of improvement for organisations.

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