



Wycliffe Hope School

Complaints Policy

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Version	Date	Notes
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2.0	March 2021	Substantial revision replacing previous versions.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose and scope

This procedure applies to Wycliffe Hope School in handling complaints made in respect of services provided by the school or against staff members, which includes employees, contractors and volunteers.

This procedure does not extend to personal grievances between parents, guardians or other members of the school community. Neither does it encompass individual employees and the impact of decisions or actions taken in the workplace that are considered to be unfair, inappropriate, contrary to school policy, or unlawful, although, in some instances, a personal 'grievance' may arise from the outcome of a complaint.

1.2 Whistleblowing complaints

This procedure does not extend to complaints, which are whistleblowing disclosures. The procedure for processing whistleblowing complaints is dealt with in the school's whistleblowing policy.

In summary a whistleblowing disclosure is a disclosure which:

- is made by a board member, staff member, a person who supplies goods or services to the school, including a volunteer, an employer of a supplier or a relative of any of these people;
- involves alleged misconduct, an improper state of affairs or circumstances, or illegal activity, and
- is made to a senior staff member, or officer of the school, the school's auditor or a person who the school has authorised to collect such disclosures.

1.3 Related policies

Complaints about reportable conduct will be addressed in accordance with the school's Child Protection Policy.

Complaints regarding a grievance between staff members about work matters – including work relationships – and decisions made by other staff members which impact on their work, are addressed in accordance with the school's Staff Grievance Policy.

Complaints regarding unlawful discrimination, harassment or bullying between staff are generally addressed in accordance with the school's Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying Statement.

1.4 Confidentiality

All parties involved in complaints handling are required to maintain appropriate confidentiality, including in relation to handling and storing records.

2. Christian Rationale

The heart of the complaint handling process is the protection and nurturing of relationships between people in the school community. Godly complaint management seeks the redemption of what was harmful and the restoration of fractured relationships. Even where original decisions of the school are not reversed, the process is designed to honour each person, and extend mercy, compassion and justice (Micah 6:8).

The foundation of the process is to seek resolution with the first person concerned, according to Matthew 18:15-16. "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'"

This approach models to students, and the school community as a whole, about dealing with conflict as people of godly character, in line with the vision of the school. It stops destructive gossip or slander, which undermines community; and builds a culture that is respectful, can value differences and which is open, transparent and trustworthy.

We live in a fallen world where mistakes and conflicts occur; but God can use even these occasions for good (Rom. 8:28-29). As the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1, conflict actually provides three significant opportunities. By God's grace, you can use conflict to:

- Glorify God (by trusting, obeying, and imitating him) (Philippians 2:5-13)
- Serve other people (by helping to bear their burdens or by confronting them in love) (Ephesians 2:4-5)
- Grow to be like Christ (by confessing sin and turning from attitudes that promote conflict). (Philippians 2:3-4)

We aim to advance the kingdom of God through working together to make the school a place of integrity and hope within the community.

(Source: CEN HUB Complaints Framework 2021)

3. Complaints

A complaint or grievance is an expression of concern, dissatisfaction or frustration with the policies, procedures or quality of service provided by the school or the behaviour or decisions of a staff member, contractor or volunteer, including misconduct. This may include, but is not limited to, a specific incident, safety matter, decision or decision-making process.

If a parent/carer or student has a concern about the conduct of a staff member, they should raise their concern with the school in accordance with section 4. If a complaint that concerns the behaviour of a staff member may constitute reportable conduct, the matter will be addressed in accordance with the school's Child Protection Policy in accordance with section 1.2. Please refer to the school's Child Protection Policy for information about reportable conduct. Complainants are not required to assess whether their concern meets the threshold of reportable conduct before making a complaint. Any concern about a child's wellbeing may be reported under this policy.

This policy will be available through the school website and Sentral parent portal. Complaints may be made by a student or parent/carer.

4. Raising a Complaint

4.1 How to make a complaint

Matters should be raised as soon as possible after an issue occurs.

1. Complaints may be made in person or on the phone; or in writing by letter or electronically. (Information made available on the school website)
2. Complainants are advised to address their concern with the person with whom they have a disagreement, according to the principle set out in Matthew 18:15. The school recognises that this is not always preferred or advisable. If the complainant does not feel comfortable doing so or the matter is one where it may not be appropriate to do so a complaint can be made to the Assistant Principal. Any complaint about the conduct of a staff member should be raised directly with the Assistant Principal in the first instance.
3. Students should speak directly to their teacher in the first instance, of any complaint about schoolwork, assessments (Secondary Assessment Policy) or issues with other students. If preferred, they can speak to the Stage Leader, Assistant Principal or Chaplain, or another trusted staff member. Students are encouraged to discuss any concerns with their parents also.
4. Staff complaints are handled according to procedures set out in the Staff Grievances Policy.

4.2 Directing complaints

1. Complaints shall generally be referred to the person most directly concerned in the matter. (Level 1)
2. More complicated matters (Level 2 or 3) may be reported to the Assistant Principal, or other appropriate staff member for resolution; or may be referred by a staff member.
3. If the issue cannot be resolved to their satisfaction, the complainant may refer the matter to a more senior staff member.

4.3 Anonymous Complaints

Anonymous complaints will be considered by the Senior Executive according to: the nature and seriousness of the complaint; whether there is sufficient information for the matter to be addressed; or whether there is a statutory requirement for investigation.

4.4 Withdrawal of a Complaint

- (a) A complaint may be withdrawn without any adverse action or decision.
- (b) The school may continue to address any issue which adversely impacts the school, its functioning, facilities or reputation, or the safety of any person, with or without the active involvement of the complainant.

5. Handling a Complaint

5.1 Explanation of Levels of Complaints and Responses

Level	Description	Raise with	Evidence	File
1	<p>Simple, minor matters, minor breach or complaint which is not part of a pattern of conduct leading to discipline or remedial action</p> <p>Generally dealt with at point of contact</p>	Staff member or Assistant Principal	Keep notes only if issue is unresolved or has potential to escalate.	Staff member's notes Sentral (Optional)
2	<p>Escalation of Level 1; or more complex matters resolved by appropriate negotiation or further investigation</p> <p>Unable to be resolved at point of contact and/ or require consultation</p> <p>More serious matters or potential consequences</p> <p>Legislative implications or potential e.g. WHS, anti-discrimination acts, Privacy</p> <p>May require investigation</p>	Assistant Principal Bus. Manager	<p>Keep file of complaint, other evidence, discussions, investigation, actions taken</p> <p>Assistant Principal/ Bus. Manager maintain log</p>	<p>Reference student matters in Sentral</p> <p>Strategic: Compliance/ Registers/ Complaints</p>
3	<p>Escalated complaint without resolution</p> <p>Repeated complaints</p> <p>Major legislative implication e.g. anti-discrimination acts; WHS; Education Act; Privacy; crime</p> <p>Requires significant investigation</p> <p>Requires involvement of Principal</p> <p>Principal reports to Board</p> <p>May require external agency referral, investigation or review</p> <p>May require legal advice/ action</p>	Principal Bus. Manager Board	<p>Keep file of complaint, other evidence, discussions, investigation, statements, proceedings, actions taken</p> <p>Business Manager maintains register</p>	<p>Business Ops: Complaints Register</p> <p>Reference student matters in Sentral register</p> <p>Business Ops: Complaints Register</p>

5.2 Assessing a Level 3 complaint

The Principal generally will assess the complaint and determine:

- whether the complaint is one to be addressed under this policy or is a staff grievance or reportable conduct matter which are dealt with by the relevant policies, see section 1.2; and
- the priority of the complaint in accordance with the urgency and/or seriousness of the matter raised; and
- whether the school may be required to report the matter to the Ombudsman, Police, Family and Community Services or other relevant authorities should the complaint relate to possible unlawful conduct or other reportable matters.

5.3 Managing a formal complaint

The Principal generally will manage a formal complaint by:

- advising the complainant of the likely steps that will be undertaken by the School in relation to the complaint;
- if appropriate, advising the relevant parties of the complaint at the relevant time and providing them with an opportunity to respond;
- collecting any additional information the School considers necessary to assess the complaint;
- making a decision about how the complaint will be resolved (“resolution decision”); and
- advising the complainant in writing, and any other relevant parties as appropriate, of the resolution decision of the Principal or their delegate and if appropriate, any proposed action to be taken.

6. Resolution

A complaint is considered resolved when the complainant and school agree on an appropriate response or remedy. Remedies or action will be implemented as soon as practicable; and parties shall be informed of the action to be taken.

Where a complaint is upheld, suitable action may include:

- Personal response e.g. Explanation; Apology; An agreement
- School response e.g. Change of original decision; Dissemination of information; Further training of staff/ students; Disciplinary action
- System improvement e.g. Review of policy or procedure; Change of school processes

If a complaint is not upheld or not substantiated but some issue comes out of the investigation that is required to be addressed, the school shall initiate suitable action.

Where a complaint is proved not to have happened at all, or if there is evidence that the complaint was made with the main purpose or intent of causing distress to the respondent, the following are possible outcomes:

- Letter from the school to the complainant
- Apology from the complainant
- Recommendation of counselling (if staff member)
- Disciplinary action

7. Contact

If you have any queries about this procedure, you should contact the Principal for advice.

Appendix

1. Complaints In Five Minutes (Staff training/ induction)

Treat it professionally

A failure to treat a complaint professionally can result in a poor outcome for a student or other member of the school community.

It can also be harshly judged in hindsight and set the tone for any litigation that may follow.

Acknowledge its importance

- Respond don't react
- Be fair and professional
- Listen, reflect concerns, clarify details
- Consider the person's needs and interests
- Approach the problem with rigour
- Plan; and be clear about expectations
- Ensure a transparent process for all

Complainants want:

- To feel secure
- Patient listening
- To be heard but not judged; treated fairly
- To have their point of view understood
- To be treated with respect & courtesy; individually
- An explanation
- An apology
- Corrective action asap; kept up to date in meantime
- To make sure the problem never happens again

DOCUMENT, DOCUMENT, DOCUMENT

- Be professional in communication
- Obtain accurate statements
- Create accurate records
- Retain records
- Complete Complaints Register (Leadership Team)

Documentation

- Description of complaint; relevant data
- Requested remedy
- Mode of complaint – written/ oral
- Practices/ issues identified in complaint
- Due date for response
- Action taken & response time
- Outcome provided to complainant
- Underlying causes & remedies

2. Table: Summary of Processes for Each Level of Complaints

Level 1 e.g. minor breach or complaint; not pattern of conduct	Assessment	Simple; resolved at first point of contact
	Process	Generally conversation with the person directly concerned
	Resolution	As appropriate: Explanation; further enquiry to find answer; agreement reached; correction of error, etc
	Records	Personal staff files/ day books Significant student issues noted on Sentral Complaints files at teacher's discretion
	Accountability	Report to Leadership Team member regularly Identify any patterns of issues or problems occurring
	Escalation	Refer to Assistant Principal Level 2

Level 2 - potential for remedial action; or discipline	Assessment	More complex; requires consultation/ further inquiry; formal complaints management process
	Process	Negotiation; or create Investigation Plan to gather further information if needed
	Resolution	As appropriate
	Records	Comprehensive notes filed by Assistant Principal in: Registers/ Complaints/ <i>Complaints Files</i> Summary logged by Assistant Principal/ <i>Complaints files</i> – plus reference other data Student issues noted on School database; cross reference to Complaints File & Complaints Log
	Accountability	Report to Assistant Principal as soon as practicable to facilitate rapid resolution
	Escalation	to Principal; Level 3

Level 3 - if proven could amount to serious consequences/ charges/ disciplinary action	Assessment	Serious matters; significant or legal implications
	Process	Investigation – use Investigation Plan to gather further information (Follow Investigation Checklist)
	Resolution	As appropriate
	Records	All documents kept in a restricted access file. Reference to complaint filed and issues noted on Sentral; cross reference to Complaints File & Complaints Register
	Accountability	The Principal shall report to the school board with respect to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● all Level 3 complaints ● the status of other existing complaints ● summary of key stakeholders ● analysis of trends or systemic issues ● progress of corrective actions
	Escalation	Appeals process Legal/ other professional advice External avenues of appeal

3. Speaking Face to Face

When addressing/ receiving concerns

Level 1

- What is the issue, concern, problem, complaint? - LISTEN
- 'Thank you for raising this matter with me' – BE APPROACHABLE
- 'I'm sorry for... *your distressconfusion, misunderstanding, unfortunate incident...*' – DON'T JUMP IN TO EXPLAIN
- 'How can I help you with this?' – LET THEM SUGGEST A RESOLUTION
- 'Perhaps I can explain.....' – CLEAR UP MISUNDERSTANDINGS
- 'Does this clear this matter up for you?' -
- YES 'Thanks again for bringing it up. Is there anything else?'
 - Make brief note in day book etc
 - Follow up on any action, promises etc
- NO 'What outcome are you looking for?' – HOW CAN YOU SOLVE THE PROBLEM

At this point it becomes a complaint.... USE PROFESSIONAL JUDGEMENT – ACTION, REFER, FOLLOW UP... What outcome does the complainant want?

- 'Do you wish to make a formal complaint? Meet with the Stage Leader or Assistant Principal?'
- Follow up on any action, promises etc - and COMMUNICATE OUTCOME/S

Level 2

- Refer to Assistant Principal – will decide whether formal complaint or not
- Make notes – email etc
- Plan to address complaint according to Complaints Procedures Handbook + 'Investigations' Handbook (Procedural fairness)
- Assistant Principal records in Complaints Register
- Notes etc. stored in Complaints file/ Sentral

Level 3

- If unable to resolve – refer to Assistant Principal, or Principal
- Business Operations: Complaints files; Complaints Register

Resolution

- 'This is what we've done/ agreed to...'
- 'Are you satisfied with this outcome?'
- There is an appeal process + how they can appeal
- 'Is there anything else I can help you with?'
- Follow up within 5 work days to ensure satisfaction