



Review Date:	February 2020
Authorised by:	Principal
Contacts:	Deputy Principal
Location/s:	SS2/MyS/SW

## **COMPLAINTS RESOLUTION POLICY (Students and Parents)**

### **1. RATIONALE**

Somerville House (the School) values the people who comprise its community and values their feedback both affirmative and critical. It encourages the members of its community to raise any concern they have with any aspect of school operations, service or personnel, directly with the School as soon as it arises.

The School acknowledges that many concerns and issues arise from simple misunderstandings or unclear communication and may be resolved in an informal manner without the need to follow a formal complaints process and it is hoped that this will be the case in most instances.

However, it is important to have in place a formal mechanism by which any person can

- voice their concerns freely, and
- have those concerns dealt with in a supportive and open manner, quickly, fairly and with confidentiality and sensitivity.

The purpose of this policy is to

- outline procedures for making a complaint about educational and administrative issues by students, parents and/or staff
- outline the principles and protocols for handling them, and
- ensure that the School is complying with the requirements of government legislation and regulations and PMSA expectations.

### **2. SCOPE**

This policy applies to staff, parents/carers, students, volunteers and members of the public who wish to bring a concern to the attention of the School.

Some complaints may be more appropriately handled under other School policies – e.g. *Child Protection, Anti-Discrimination, Anti-Bullying*.

Staff complaints related to their work environment will be dealt with under the *PMSA's Grievance Policy and Procedures*.

### **3. POLICY STATEMENT**

- 3.1 The School will ensure that all complaints are handled fairly, impartially, sensitively and in a timely manner with discretion and in accordance with the principles of procedural fairness.
- 3.2 Information about the complaints resolution process will be disseminated to all members of the School community.

- 3.3 The School will ensure that all members of staff have training to enable them to handle complaints positively and appropriately.
- 3.4 The School will only act on anonymous complaints if they relate to Child Protection issues, unless the Principal, at her discretion and depending on the nature of the complaint, decides that action is to be taken.
- 3.5 The Principal and/or School Council have the authority to determine whether a complaint is vexatious or frivolous.
- 3.6 The internal complaints and appeals processes are conciliatory and non-legal.

#### 4. REFERENCES

##### 4.1 References to Other Policy

- *Anti-Bullying Policy*
- *Anti-Discrimination Policy*
- *Assessment Policy*
- *Behaviour Management and Discipline Policy*
- *Child Protection Policy*
- *Privacy Policy*

##### 4.2 Legislative and Other References

- *ISQ Complaints Policy Template*
- *Guidelines for Staff to Follow when receiving Complaints from Students, Parents or Members of the Public*

#### 5. RESPONSIBILITIES AND DELEGATIONS

##### Principal

- Ensure all members of the School community are aware of the policy and processes for lodging a complaint.
- Ensure compliance with legislative, regulatory and PMSA requirements.
- Ensure staff receive training to deal with handling complaints positively and effectively
- Ensure staff in Middle and Senior management roles are trained in conflict resolution.

##### Staff

- Handle complaints positively in accordance with the complaints resolution procedures.
- Ensure no person is adversely treated for raising a complaint.

**Note: The School Council and Principal are delegated the responsibility and authority to determine whether a complaint is frivolous or vexatious.**

#### 6. PROCEDURES

##### 6.1 Principles for handling complaints

The key principles are listed below.

- People are entitled to raise concerns and make complaints.
- The School is open to all concerns raised and receives them in a positive manner.
- Efforts will be made to investigate and resolve complaints at the appropriate School level.

- It is not acceptable for students to receive adverse treatment because they or their parents have raised a complaint.
- The seriousness of each complaint will be assessed before beginning the process.
- All parties must have the opportunity to put their case forward and be heard.
- All parties' perspectives will be acknowledged and considered.
- Each complaint will be considered on its own merits and within the context of the pressures and demands placed on families and the School.
- All parties will be treated with dignity and respect.
- Appropriate confidentiality is expected of all parties, with allowance for thorough investigation of the complaint by the School.
- All complaints will be dealt with in a non-threatening, respectful manner.
- The School will endeavour to provide a supportive environment for all parties, and ensure the professional status of staff is appropriately respected.
- The School will endeavour to resolve all complaints in a timely manner. The time frame for resolution, however, will depend on the complexity, nature and scope of the complaint.
- The School will only share information and address problems with those who genuinely need to be aware of the information.
- Clear, confidential files will be maintained.

## 6.2 Process for raising a concern or making a complaint

6.2.1 **Stage 1.** In the first instance, the person wishing to raise an issue should consider an informal, face to face discussion with the person with whom they have the concern, seeking to clarify the situation and/or clear up any misunderstandings. If the matter is not resolved, or the complaint is of a serious nature then the matter may be taken to the next formal level. If the person does not feel comfortable raising the matter with the person concerned, they should direct the complaint to the appropriate person for dealing with it at the next level.

### **Stage 2. Raising a concern or making a complaint**

- **Students**

Students can raise a concern with any staff member with whom they feel comfortable. It is then the responsibility of that staff member to pass the concern on to the relevant person. Students may need support from another student or adult during the process.

- **Parents/carers**

(a) A complaint may be made in person, by telephone, by email or by writing.

(b) Complaints should be directed to the relevant person, as indicated on the flowchart at Stage 2, in accordance with the area to which it is related. (*Refer Attachment 2 – Whom Do I Contact To Raise An Issue? (For Parent/Student Referral)*).

(c) Note:

- i. If the complaint relates to another student or students, direct the complaint to the relevant member of staff depending on the Sub-School:
  - in the Junior School – the class teacher;
  - in the Senior School - the Head of Year.

- ii. If the complaint relates to a member of the staff, direct the complaint to the relevant person in the Junior or Senior School:
  - in the Junior School – to the Assistant Head of Junior School – Teaching and Learning (curriculum or teaching/learning related issues) and to the Assistant Head of Junior School - Pastoral and Administration (pastoral and administrative issues)
  - in the Senior School - the Heads of Year (pastoral issues), Heads of Department ( curriculum or teaching/learning related issues)
- iii. If the complaint relates to a Head of Year, direct the complaint to the Dean of Student Wellbeing.
- iv. If the complaint relates to a Head of Department, direct the complaint to the Dean of Teaching Practices, or the Dean of Academic Programs.
- v. If the complaint relates to a member of the Leadership Team, direct the complaint in writing to the Principal or make an appointment to discuss the matter.
- vi. If the complaint relates to the Principal, put the complaint in writing and forward to the Chair of Council at the School Postal Address.
- vii. If the complaint relates to the Council or any member of Council, including the Chair, put the complaint in writing and forward to the Presbyterian and Methodist Schools' Association (PMSA) at PO Box 298, Toowong, Queensland 4066.

### 6.3 Process for dealing with complaint in Stages 2-5

- 6.3.1 The person at the next level (the recipient) who receives the complaint will attempt to resolve the complaint through discussion with the complainant.
- 6.3.2 If this is not successful, the complainant will be asked to put the matter in writing, setting out concisely the details of the complaint, the facts on which it is based, the progress of discussions to date and possible solutions.
- 6.3.3 The recipient will notify the respondent, discuss the situation with him/her, providing the opportunity for the respondent to respond, give their perceptions of the problem and possible solutions. It may be possible at this stage, with further discussion with the complainant, that the matter may be resolved.
- 6.3.4 If a further discussion is unsatisfactory, the recipient will refer the matter to the senior staff member at the next level.

#### **Stage 3.**

- 6.3.5 After discussion with both the complainant and the respondent, and if the matter is still unresolved, the senior staff member at this next level may convene a meeting.
- 6.3.6 Meetings at this stage aim to use a neutral third party to help resolve the issue, by isolating themes and problems, clarifying issues and sequences of events and encouraging the parties to create solutions which are mutually acceptable.

Both parties may be accompanied by a support person and should notify the convenor of the meeting beforehand if they are doing so. The convenor will notify everyone who will be present at the meeting.

(Note: The support person is not there as a spokesperson and does not play an active role in the process.)

The meeting should be held in an informal setting and conducted in a manner that is “without prejudice” to the participants’ rights so as to encourage open and frank discussion with a satisfactory resolution to the complaint as the desired outcome.

Confidentiality is expected of all parties.

6.3.7 Complainants have the right to seek independent advice from any source at any stage of the process.

6.3.8 The convenor may suspend the meeting at any time, if any person behaves in an insulting, threatening or offensive manner.

**NOTE: At ALL stages of the process, detailed, accurate notes should be maintained and Senior Staff at the next level kept informed.**

6.3.9 In the event that no resolution is reached or that one party is not happy with the procedure, the matter can be taken to the next level. This would normally be the Deputy Principal.

The parties may also agree to mediation with an external mediator or someone from the School. (e.g. Chaplain or Counsellor.)

#### **Stage 4.**

6.3.10 If the parties do not agree to mediation and/or the matter is still not resolved, it will be referred to the Principal or her nominee for determination.

6.3.11 The Principal or her nominee will then investigate the circumstances through:

- perusal of the written documents
- interviews with the complainant, respondent, and any other persons whom they believe may be in possession of information relevant to the complaint; and/or
- perusal of any further information provided by the parties, including witness materials, accounts or any other evidence relevant to the issue.

6.3.12 The Principal or her nominee will use the above process to determine the substance of the allegations/complaint and will recommend a course of action to resolve the issue.

6.3.13 In the event the parties do not accept that recommendation, the Principal or her nominee, will determine how the School will deal with the complaint and will inform the parties in writing of the outcome of his/her deliberations. She may, at her discretion, include the reasons for coming to that decision.

#### **Stage 5.**

6.3.14 If the parties are still not satisfied, they may refer the matter to the Chair of Council who will review the circumstances of the complaint and advise the parties, including the Principal, whether the determination is to stand or the matter resolved in some other way.

## 6.4 Determinations

The Principal or her nominee and the Chair of Council in determining the complaint, may recommend, but are not limited to, the following courses of action:

- dismiss the complaint as vexatious, frivolous or not having substance
- require apologies from either party
- require disciplinary action or reprimand
- recommend counselling
- recommend further training
- recommend dismissal
- make changes to procedures or policies; and/or
- recommend ongoing monitoring of the situation.

The School Council or Principal may delegate to an external person or agency the authority to review a complaint and report the result of the review to the Council or Principal as applicable. The investigating authority may make recommendations they consider appropriate to the circumstances.

## 7. DEFINITIONS

**Complaint/grievance** is a concern or expression of dissatisfaction about any act, behaviour, omission, situation or decision, which someone thinks is unfair or unjustified. A complaint may be brought against the School as a whole, a specific department or about an individual member of staff.

**Complainant** is any person who has a concern or grievance.

**Respondent** is any person against whom a complaint or grievance is brought.

**Procedural fairness** the rules or principles which should be applied in the handling of a complaint, to ensure that decision making is fair and reasonable. It involves the decision maker:

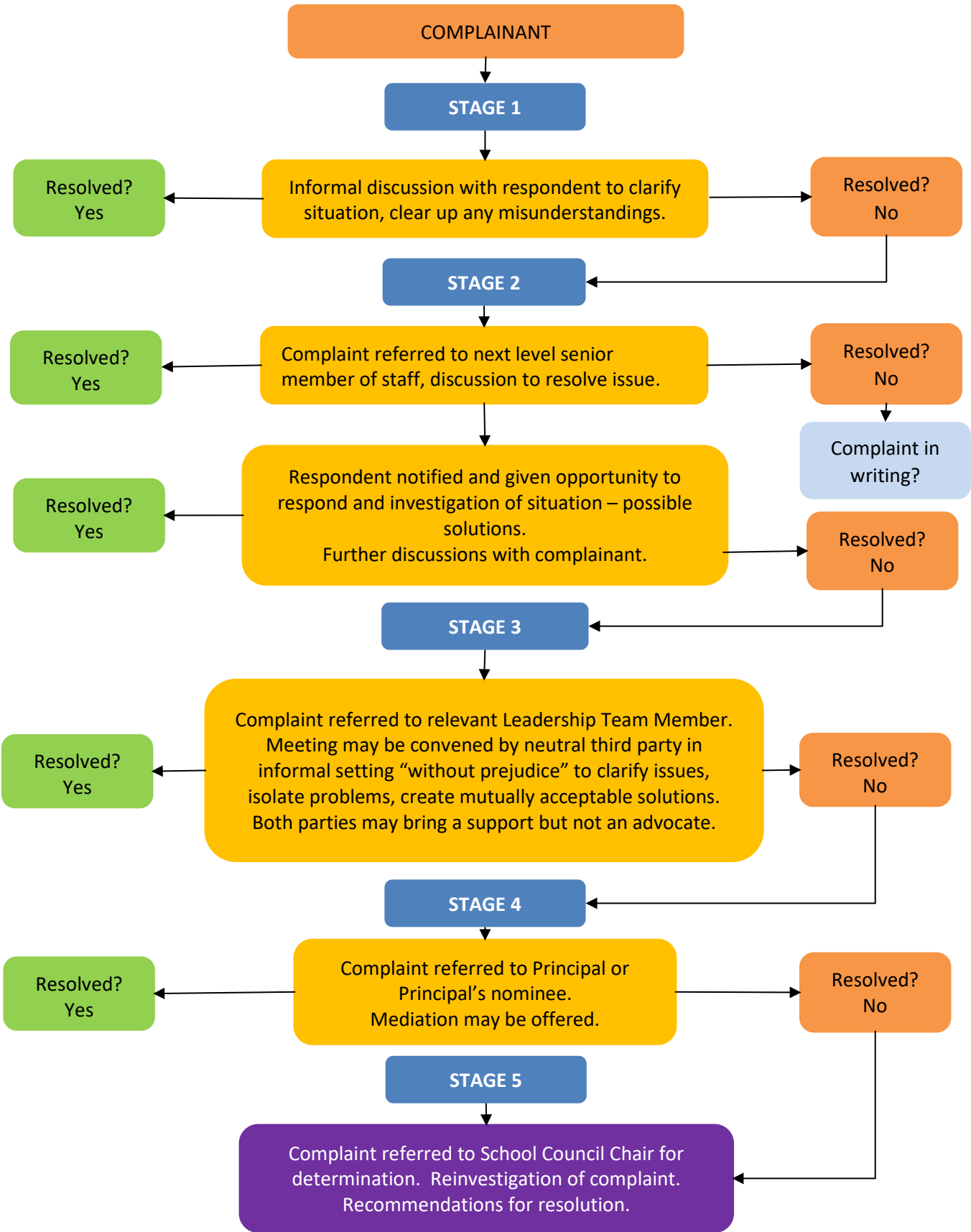
- informing the people of the case against them
- giving them the right to be heard
- not having a personal interest in the outcome; and
- basing the decision on the evidence before him/her.

## 8. ATTACHMENTS

1. *Complaints Resolution Process – Flowchart for staff referral.*
2. *Who Do I Contact to raise an issue? (For Parent/Student Referral).*

Version Control Table			
Version Control	Date Effective	Approved By	Amendment
2 (Version 1 - March 2019)	February 2020	Principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contacts: replaced Dean of Students with Deputy Principal</li> <li>• Updated Attachment 1 (stages 4 and 5) to be in line with the process outlined in 6.3.</li> <li>• Removed references to “Middle School”, or replaced with “Middle Years” where appropriate</li> <li>• Updated job titles</li> <li>• Updated terminology (ie. Executive Team to Leadership Team/s)</li> <li>• Remove references to Head of School and replaced with appropriate job titles</li> <li>• Removed references to attachments at end of point 6.</li> <li>• Updated general formatting and grammatical updates</li> </ul>

# COMPLAINTS RESOLUTION PROCESS



**Note:** At all levels the principles of procedural fairness should be applied and depending on the nature of the complaint or depending on whom the respondent to the complaint is, various stages may be bypassed.



## WHO DO I CONTACT TO RAISE AN ISSUE? (FOR PARENT/STUDENT REFERRAL)

