



HIGHFIELDS STATE SECONDARY COLLEGE

COMPLAINTS MANAGEMENT PROCEDURE

Complaints come to principals and other school staff in many forms. Complaints can be from parents/carers, community, staff or students.

This document outlines the procedures undertaken at this College to manage complaints. Complaints management at this school is also underpinned by section 46 of the *Education (General-Provisions) Act 2006 (Qld)*, Education Queensland's Complaints Management - State Schools and Making a Complaint located on the department's website.

All complaints are handled in a positive and open way.

1. Documentation

The school documents all complaints.

Complaints are recorded and reported to the principal as soon as practicable after receiving the complaint.

Complaints can be made directly to the principal.

The record of the complaint:

- uses objective language clearly stating the facts
- contains information in chronological order as practically possible
- uses quotation marks, where appropriate and necessary
- is neatly and legibly written in biro/pen or in print in clear unambiguous language
- includes, where necessary, initialled and dated corrections
- includes signature, designation of the author, and time and date of the incident/complaint.

If the complaint is not resolved at the first point of contact, the complaint is acknowledged within five working days by telephone, in person, by email, or in writing. Documents related to the complaint are kept and stored in accordance with the relevant departmental policies and procedures. Please refer to Managing the Department's Records and Access to Records Held in Schools.

2. Complaints Management Phases

There are four key phases in handling a complaint, with the option of a fifth phase for review of a complaint outcome:

- Phase 1. Receiving and clarifying the complaint
- Phase 2. Deciding how to handle the complaint
- Phase 3. Finding out about the complaint
- Phase 4. Making a decision about the complaint
- Phase 5. Review

Phase 1 - Receiving and clarifying the complaint

Any member of staff can receive a complaint.

All complaints are received in the following manner:

- being respectful and helpful
- giving the person your undivided attention
- not being defensive, apportioning blame
- remaining positive
- not perceiving anger as a personal attack.

When a staff member receives a verbal complaint they:

- listen carefully to the issues being raised
- summarise the issues to clarify and check that they understand what the complainant is telling you
- empathise and acknowledge the complainant's feelings
- find out what the complainant wants to happen as a result of the complaint
- tell the complainant that they may use the support of a third party in progressing the complaint, if they feel this is needed
- resolve the complaint if possible, or assure the complainant that an appropriate staff member will address their complaint
- advise the complainant what will happen with their complaint
- thank them for their complaint.

Complaints are sometimes made with the assistance of an advocate, interpreter or by a third party (as agreed between the complainant and the principal). In this case staff will receive and clarify a complaint from more than one person.

Many complaints are resolved at the first point of contact with information and/or an explanation, together with an apology and recognition of the effect the situation has had on the person. Some complainants may also want an undertaking that action will be taken to prevent the problem recurring.

When the complaint is not resolved immediately, the complaint is referred to the principal as soon as is practicable.

A member of staff who receives a verbal complaint that is not resolved informs the complainant of the further options of:

- putting their complaint in writing, or
- assisting the member of staff to record, in writing, the particulars of their complaint.

In general, if the complainant agrees to put the complaint in writing, the member of staff takes no further action unless or until a written complaint is received.

However, if the complaint relates to a report about harm (whether physical/emotional/sexual) of a student under 18 years attending a state educational institution, refer to Student Protection, for detailed obligations of all Education Queensland employees.

Once the complainant indicates that they would like to register a formal complaint verbally, the member of staff makes a written outline of the issues concerned. The record is read to the complainant, with opportunity for appropriate amendments and the complainant is asked

to sign, where possible, the written version of the complaint. The staff member also signs (indicating their personal designation, for example, 'Year 7 Teacher, XYZ State School') and dates the complaint.

No signature is required for verbal complaints taken over the phone, but the complainant is asked to provide verbal confirmation of the issues that have been recorded.

If a complainant refuses to sign or confirm a written recording of a verbal complaint, the staff member notes the refusal on the written complaint. The complainant is told that this refusal will be noted and that the process will be reliant on the staff member's interpretation and notes only. The complainant may not, at a later date, make another complaint based on a lack of satisfaction with this record of complaint.

Receiving a written complaint

When a written complaint is received it is date-stamped and forwarded to the principal.

Receiving an anonymous complaint

When an anonymous complaint is received, the complainant is told of the possible limitations associated with making an anonymous complaint.

Phase 2 - Deciding how to handle the complaint

When a staff member receives a complaint, they:

- begin the process of making an assessment about a complaint from the moment the complaint is received
- make an assessment in the first instance about whether the issue can be dealt with as a concern or a complaint
- if they are not the principal, refer the complainant or the complaint to the principal for addressing.

The principal decides whether to:

- take no further action
- attempt to resolve the complaint through resolution strategies such as mediation
- refer the complaint to the relevant internal or external agency if required
- initiate an investigation of the complaint, within the school, if further information is required.

Co-ordination of complaints

The principal has the final responsibility for the management of all complaints that relate to school management issues under his/her jurisdiction. The complaint can be referred to another staff member in the school for action (for example, the deputy principal, business services manager or nominated staff member).

If the complaint relates to departmental policy, or a departmental policy position, the complainant is advised to take their complaint to the relevant regional office.

If the complaint is in relation to official misconduct, student protection or a perceived breach of privacy, the complaint is directed to the Ethical Standards Unit and the Legal Administrative Law Branch.

Record of complaint

The principal ensures that records of a complaint and any referral of a complaint are kept for either internal or external review.

Phase 3 - Finding out about the complaint

The principal or delegate gathers all the necessary facts about the complaint while keeping in mind the principles of natural justice of all parties concerned.

The principal or delegate investigates complaints by:

- collecting and analysing information relevant to the matter
- working collaboratively with all people involved
- finding the facts relating to the matter
- identifying any contributing factors to the matter
- consulting the relevant DETE Procedure Register on issues that relate to the complaint
- documenting the investigation report or outcome.

Phase 4 - Making a decision about the complaint

Based on the facts gathered in Phase 3 about the complaint, the principal or delegate makes a decision on the complaint.

Notifying the complainant of the decision

Within 28 days of the receipt of the complaint, the principal provides the complainant with either:

- a written response, including reasons for the decision, or
- a written notification that their complaint has been referred to an internal or external agency.

Phase 5 Review Phase

If the complainant is not satisfied with this response, they are encouraged to discuss it further with the school principal and/or advised to contact the principal's supervisor, the Executive Director, Schools at the regional office.