



POLICY & PROCEDURE: Complaints Handling (Parent / School Communication)

System: School Management	Audience: School Community
Primary Responsibility:	Headmaster
Approved by:	School Board/Headmaster
Updated Document:	1/1/2002, 1/1/2014, 6/11/2018
Effective: 17/11/2023	Review Date: 2025
Manual Reference:	3.6, 3.9

1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This procedure applies to Central Coast Grammar 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.

2. WHISTLEBLOWING COMPLAINTS

This procedure does not extend to complaints which are whistleblowing disclosures. The procedure for processing whistleblowing complaints are 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 authorized to collect such disclosures.

1.3 RELATED POLICIES

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

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/Procedure.

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

1.4 CONFIDENTIALITY

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

2. COMPLAINTS

A complaint or grievance is an expression of dissatisfaction made to the school about an educational and/or operational matter relating to services provided by the school or the behaviour or decisions of a staff member, contractor or volunteer, including misconduct.

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 3. 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 and Procedure in accordance with section 2. Please refer to the school's Child Protection Policy and Procedure for information about reportable conduct. Complaints 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.

Complaints may be made by a student or parent/carer.

The school will seek to resolve complaints informally where possible but acknowledges that in some cases a person may wish to make a formal complaint.

3. RAISING A COMPLAINT

3.1 THE COMPLAINANT

Informal complaints may be raised by a complainant directly with the person involved. However, 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 Headmaster. Any complaint about the conduct of a staff member should be raised directly with the Headmaster in the first instance.

Should the matter not be resolved through informal processes, the complainant may raise the matter formally with the school. A formal complaint can be made in writing to the Headmaster.

Where a person wishes to make a formal complaint concerning the Headmaster, the complaint should be made in writing to the Chair of the School Board. In this situation, the references in this policy relating to the role of the Headmaster should be read as references to the Chair of the School Board.

3.2 THE SCHOOL

The Headmaster will generally acknowledge receipt of a formal complaint in writing as soon as practicable.

4. HANDLING COMPLAINTS

4.1 ASSESSING A COMPLAINT

The Headmaster 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 and procedures, see section 1.2
- The priority of the complaint in accordance with the urgency and/or seriousness of the matter raised
- 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.

4.2 MANAGING A FORMAL COMPLAINT

The Headmaster will manage a formal complaint by:

- a) Advising the complainant of the likely steps that will be undertaken by the school in relation to the complaint

- b) If appropriate, advising the relevant parties of the complaint at the relevant time and providing them with an opportunity to respond
- c) Collecting any additional information the School considers necessary to assess the complaint
- d) Making a decision about how the complaint will be resolved (“resolution decision”)
- e) Advising the complainant in writing, and any other relevant parties as appropriate, of the resolution decision of the Headmaster and if appropriate, any proposed action to be taken.

There may be circumstances where some of the steps outlined above are not appropriate and the school will determine, on a case by case basis the most appropriate method of handling the complaint.

A complainant and the relevant parties that the complaint is about may choose to have an appropriate support person present at any meeting with representatives of the School about the complaint. However, the School maintains the right to determine whether the person’s preferred support person is appropriate and may not approve the attendance of a support person where they are determined by the School to be inappropriate.

5. PARENT/SCHOOL COMMUNICATION

5.1 OBJECTIVE

The School holds many meetings through the year that encourage parents to attend the School and to meet the staff. The dates and times are published in a semester calendar, which is distributed to all parents. They are also detailed in the School’s weekly Newsletter. These include Parent/Student/Teacher conferences, Family Support Nights, Parents & Friends meetings and may be academic, pastoral, sporting or purely social in nature. The School strongly encourages parents to attend as a means of staying informed and voicing opinions.

We are committed to resolving complaints promptly at a local level. If you wish to make a complaint start by talking to the teacher, House Coordinator, Head of School or the Headmaster as appropriate.

CCGS is committed to providing a Child Safe Environment. In the case of complaints of inappropriate staff behaviour, misconduct or reportable conduct, reporting procedures dictated by Child Protection Legislation will be adhered to.

5.2. CONTEXT

There will always be occasions when parents need to contact the School on an individual basis. The School prefers in the case of the Junior School, such contact should commence with the **class teacher**. In the Middle School and the Senior College contact should commence with the class teacher/ student's **House Coordinator**. However, it must be understood that as these staff members are often in the classroom and therefore not immediately available, it will sometimes be necessary to leave a message requesting a return phone call. Parents are reminded that their child's Diary is an ideal means of communication for passing informal messages to teachers, Roll Call Teachers and House Coordinators.

WHAT CAN A COMPLAINT BE ABOUT?

You can make a complaint about:

- any aspect of the service we provide
- any decision, including those about enrolment
- any practice, policy or procedure
- inappropriate staff behaviour, misconduct, or *reportable conduct

There are 4 key pieces of child protection legislation in NSW. These are the:

- Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998
- The Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012 ('WWC Act')the Children's Guardian Act 2019 ('Children's Guardian Act')
- the Crimes Act 1990 ('Crimes Act').

*Section 25A(1) of the Ombudsman Act defines 'reportable conduct' as:

- any sexual offence or sexual misconduct committed against, with or in the presence of a child - including a child pornography offence
- any assault, ill-treatment or neglect of a child
- any behaviour that causes psychological harm to a child – even if the child consented to the behaviour.

INFORMAL PARENTAL CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS

The staff members mentioned above should be the first to be contacted, although they may refer a parent on to a colleague whose responsibilities are more pertinent to the issue raised. This referral approach will usually follow the format below, with personnel listed in priority order so that the staff member mentioned first would be approached first:

Junior School	Middle School	Senior College
<p>For academic issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the class teacher the specialist teacher the Year Leaderthe Head of Junior School the Deputy Headmaster 	<p>For academic issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the class teacher/House Coordinator the Head of Department the Head of Middle School the Deputy Headmaster 	<p>For academic issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the class teacher/House Coordinator the Head of Departmentthe Head of Senior College the Deputy Headmaster
<p>For wellbeing and organisation issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the class teacher the Wellbeing Coordinator the Head of Junior School the Deputy Headmaster 	<p>For wellbeing and organisation issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the class teacher the House Coordinator Deputy Head of Middle School the Head of Middle School the Deputy Headmaster 	<p>For wellbeing and organisation issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the class teacher the House Coordinator Deputy Head of Senior College the Head of Senior College the Deputy Headmaster
<p>For disciplinary or administrative issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the Deputy Head of Junior School the Head of Junior School the Deputy Headmaster 	<p>For disciplinary or administrative issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the Deputy Head of Middle School the Head of Middle School the Deputy Headmaster 	<p>For disciplinary or administrative issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the Deputy Head of Senior College the Head of Senior College the Deputy Headmaster

Having raised an informal concern or complaint, parents are encouraged to follow it through, approaching staff in the order shown above, until the issue is satisfactorily resolved. Staff will make every attempt to resolve issues and complaints. Issues and complaints should only be escalated if unresolved within a reasonable period of time e.g. a school working week (5 days).

FOR ALL STUDENTS

For Community Relations and Communications and Publications

- Head of Community Engagement/Advancement

For Enrolment concerns:

- Enrolment Manager
- Deputy Headmaster
- Headmaster

For Financial concerns:

- Business Manager
- Headmaster

For Health concerns:

- House Coordinator
- Deputy Head of School
- Head of School
- Deputy Headmaster
- Headmaster

For Mental Health concerns:

- House Coordinator
- Counsellors
- Deputy Head of School
- Head of School
- Deputy Headmaster
- Headmaster

For Sports concerns:

- Director/Head of Sport
- Deputy Heads of School
- Head of School
- Deputy Headmaster
- Headmaster

For ICT concerns:

- ICT Manager
- Head of School
- Business Manager
- Deputy Headmaster
- Headmaster

Canteen:

- Canteen Manager
- Business Manager
- Headmaster

Grounds and Maintenance:

- Property Manager
- Business Manager
- Headmaster

Work Health and Safety

- Property Manager
- Business Manager
- Headmaster

FORMAL PARENTAL COMPLAINTS

Unresolved complaints after following the previous format should be addressed to the Head of School. If the complaint deals with a particularly serious matter, it should be referred to the Head of School in the first instance. If the matter is still unresolved the Deputy Headmaster and the Headmaster should be contacted.

- If parents have a specific issue about inappropriate staff behaviour, misconduct, or reportable conduct, it is to be directed to the Headmaster. If there is another matter which they want the Headmaster to formally investigate, they must put the complaint in writing and give permission for the complaint to be shared with the staff member(s) or persons concerned, unless legal or legislative requirements prevent this being applicable.

Parents are advised the School Board will not address complaints directly unless the formal 'Parental Complaints' process listed above is followed and:

- a) the issue has first been addressed with the Headmaster and remains unresolved to the parent's satisfaction; and
- b) the Headmaster has been formally advised that the issue remains unresolved and the parent intends to take the matter up with the School Board; and
- c) parents write to the Chair of the Board to formally complain.

If the matter is still unresolved after discussion with the Chair of the Board, parents must accept that their complaint has been heard and cannot be resolved, as they would wish it to be resolved. The Board's determination on a complaint is final.

Parents are assured that, with their permission, complaints will only be shared with the people who need to be involved, as judged by the Headmaster. Parents should expect no recriminations for the child(ren) of parents making a complaint; the Headmaster should be informed immediately if parents believe that this has not been the case and this will be dealt with as a separate matter.

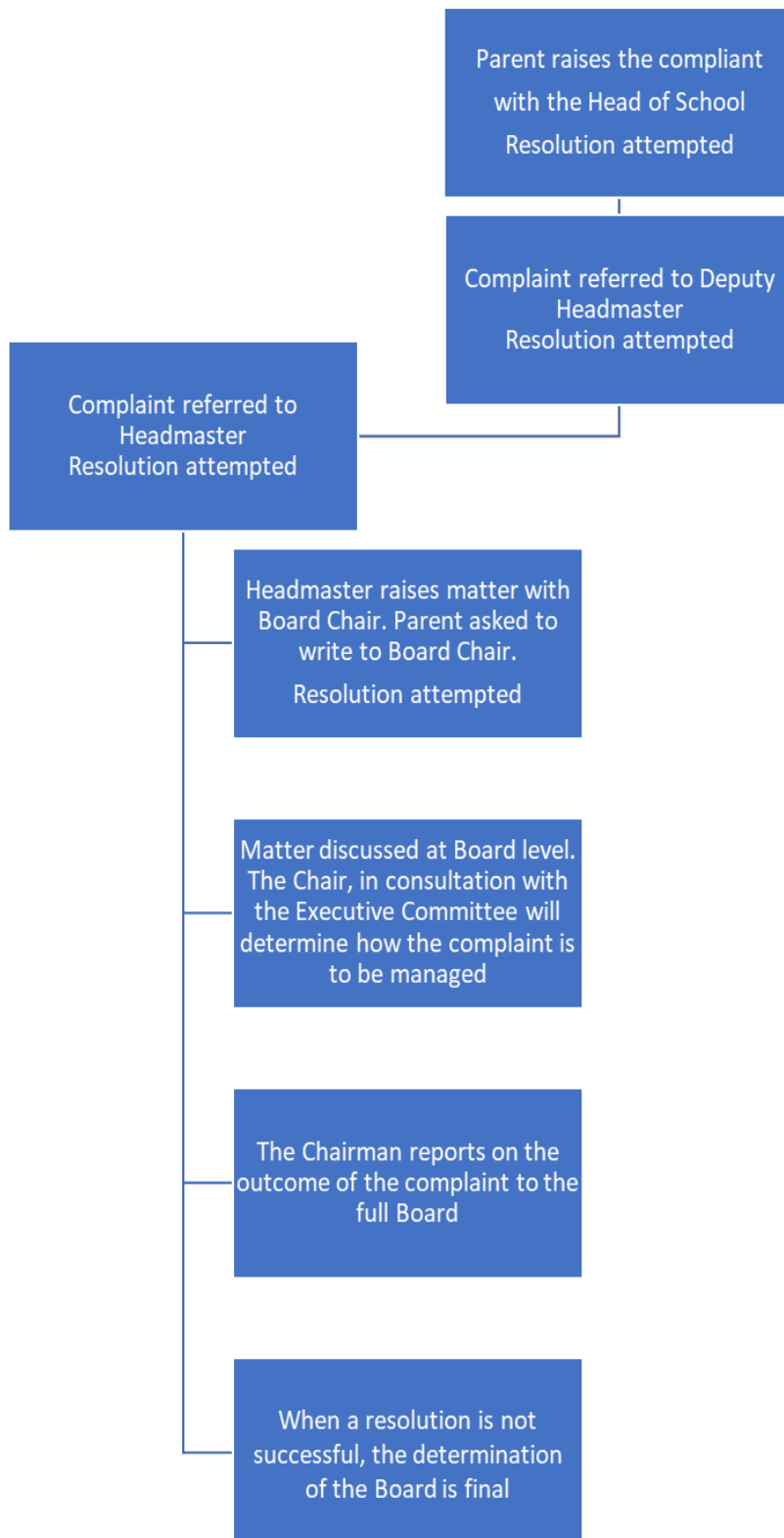
Complaints relating to the Headmaster should be directed in writing to the Chair of the Board. The Chairman of the Board, in consultation with at least two other Board members, will determine how the complaint is to be managed and will inform the complainant in writing.

Complaints relating to Board members should be directed in writing to the Chair of the Board. The Chair of the Board, in consultation with at least two other Board members, will determine how the complaint is to be managed and will inform the complainant in writing.

Complaints relating to the Chair of the Board should be directed in writing to the Deputy Chair of the Board. The Deputy Chair in consultation with at least two other Board members, will determine how the complaint is to be managed and will inform the complainant in writing.

In all cases the Headmaster and any Board member will be informed as soon as is practicable of any complaint against them, given a copy of the complaint and informed of the process determined to deal with the complaint. Exceptions to this will be where legal or legislative requirements preclude this from happening or where the management of the complaint would be significantly compromised.

Standard Flow Chart for Formal Complaints (A Board Policy Document)



6. CONTACT

If you have any queries about this procedure, you should contact the appropriate Head of School, the Deputy Headmaster or the Human Resources Manager to advise.