



Complaints and Grievances Policy

Foundation for Life

Complaints and Grievances Policy

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1. Policy Rationale

At Coast Christian School ("Coast"), we recognise that from time to time there may be disappointment or dissatisfaction with our services. We welcome hearing the concerns of parents (including guardians, caregivers etc), students and other stakeholders (collectively known as "Complainants" in this Policy).

We seek to engage with the intention of reaching mutual understanding and prompt resolution of Complaints and Grievances (referred to collectively in this Policy as "Complaints"), for the purpose of continually improving services provided by Coast.

2. Policy Purpose

The purpose of this Policy is to provide Complainants with the opportunity to facilitate the resolution of a dispute or Complaint. This Policy presents a conciliatory approach and not a legally binding determination of issues raised.

3. Policy Approval

This Policy has been set in place and approved by the Board of Directors to ensure Complaints are resolved promptly and amicably, and to avoid the unnecessary escalation of concerns whilst simultaneously equipping Complainants with an opportunity to be heard, understood, and responded to appropriately and in a timely manner.

4. Guiding Principles

- At Coast, we endeavour to put God first in implementing this Policy and to act in accordance with our Values.
- All Complaints are received by Coast in a positive manner and taken seriously.
- Management of Complaints is guided by the principles of natural justice and procedural fairness.
- All communications relating to a Complaint are to be characterised by courtesy and respect from all involved.
- Coast and Complainants alike should communicate regarding a Complaint with the intention of resolving concerns and preserving relationships.
- Coast takes responsibility for protecting members of the School community, including students and staff, from circumstances that might be harmful to an individual's well-being or reputation.

- Complainants who are Parents have a recognised right to seek access to information about and clarification of circumstances relating to the education and welfare of students in their care.
- Concerns should be limited in disclosure to relevant personnel and strict confidentiality is to be maintained. The privacy of students, parents, staff and other stakeholders should be upheld as far as is reasonable and appropriate in the circumstances.
- Complaints should be communicated to Coast according to the guidelines set out in this Policy.

5. Allegations of Staff Misconduct or Reportable Conduct

If a complaint relates to an allegation of staff misconduct or reportable conduct, please reference to our related procedure "Complaints Handling Procedures regarding allegations of staff misconduct or reportable conduct".

6. Approach to Complaints Handling

This Policy provides a two-tiered approach for making Complaints:

- an "Initial Complaint" and/or
- a "Formal Complaint"

7. Initial Complaints

An Initial Complaint is a matter which can be resolved either by relevant Coast staff and/or the Principal. Complainants may choose whether they communicate an initial Complaint verbally or in writing, by email or by text message (social media posts are not to be used for complaint-making purposes).

An "Initial Complaint" is converted to a Formal Complaint if the matter is still not resolved after the Initial Complaint processes are exhausted.

8. Formal Complaints

A Formal Complaint is a matter referred to the Complaints Committee of the Coast Christian School Board of Directors via the Board Chair (boardchair@coastcs.nsw.edu.au) for assistance with resolution.

Complainants should exhaust the processes provided in this Policy before approaching the Board, unless there is an appropriate reason to circumvent the Initial Complaint processes as outlined below.

9. Serious or Sensitive Complaints

Some Complaints, because of the seriousness of their nature or sensitivity of the subject matter, should be referred immediately to the Principal – eg Child Protection issues or Complaints about behaviour which places others at risk of harm etc - in which case follow the steps outlined in our Child Protection Policy.

10. Concerns about the Principal

Any concerns relating to the Principal can either be made directly to the Principal - if the Complainant is comfortable to do so - otherwise directly to the Board by emailing the Board Chair on boardchair@coastcs.nsw.edu.au.

11. Concerns about the Board Chair or Other Board Members

Any concerns relating to the Board Chair or other Board Members can be made to the Senior Pastor of Coast Community Church, noting the Senior Pastor is always also a Board Member of Coast. The Senior Pastor can be contacted via the general contact details provided on the [Coast Community Church](#) website.

12. Vexatious Complaints

The Principal is authorised by the Board to characterise Complaints as “vexatious” using reasonable judgment and discernment. If the Principal determines a Complaint to be vexatious, the Principal will communicate this view to the Complainant, verbally if the Complaint was made verbally and in writing or by email if the Complaint was made in writing. If the Complainant is unsatisfied with this determination, the Complainant may approach the Board for assistance in accordance with this Policy. If the Board’s Complaints Committee regards the Complaint to be vexatious, the Committee Chair will inform the Complainant of that decision and the Complaint will be closed.

13. Concerns About Other Students/Parents

Unless a parent is confident that their relationship with another parent is such as to warrant an initial attempt at resolving conflict directly with the other parent, Coast recommends that Parents first approach the relevant teacher for assistance with a concern about another student and/or parent. Especially where there is a history of animosity, situations can be often sensitive and can often be best managed with the assistance of the relevant teacher and/or Principal to ensure a fair process is facilitated. Parents should bear in mind the Code of Conduct for Parents/Visitors etc when considering their intended approach.

14. Staff Concerns About Other Staff

Where a staff member has a concern about another staff member, the matter should be initially taken up with that other staff member with a view to resolving the issue quickly and amicably. If that

is not possible or if it is inappropriate in the circumstances, the staff member should seek the assistance of the Principal. The Staff Code of Conduct should be followed at all times.

15. Staff Concerns About the Principal

Where a staff member has a concern about the Principal, the matter should be initially taken up with the Principal with a view to resolving the issue quickly and amicably. If that is not possible or if it is inappropriate in the circumstances, the staff member should seek the assistance and direction of the Board Chair (boardchair@coastcs.nsw.edu.au). The Staff Code of Conduct should be followed at all times.

16. Whistleblowing Concerns

Complainants who wish to receive the legal protections of Whistleblowing legislation, should read and follow Coast's Whistleblower Policy **first**, because some Whistleblower Protections may be lost if this Complaints Policy is used instead.

If the Whistleblower Policy has been exhausted, the Complainant may make a Complaint under this Policy if their concerns continue.

Depending on the circumstances, it may be possible that a Whistleblowing concern might be progressed using the step-by-step procedures outlined in this Policy – but only if written consent is received from all participants to that course of action; along with agreement as to any context-appropriate revisions to the procedure.

17. Examples of Complaints

The types of possible Complaints which could be dealt with under this Policy are unlimited but some potential examples include:

- Child Protection issues (but note that Mandatory Reporting and Reportable Conduct provisions under the Child Protection Policy should be addressed first and foremost).
- Dissatisfaction with educational outcomes
- Dissatisfaction with student treatment
- Bullying of one child by another (but note the Anti-Bullying & Cyber Bullying Policy)
- Allegations of misconduct by teachers
- Harassment of a staff member by a superior, peer or subordinate (but note Harassment Policy also)

18. Making an Informal Complaint

18.1. Communicate with Relevant Staff Member

Coast encourages an attempt to resolve issues informally where possible. We invite complainants to raise concerns with us as soon as they arise – the sooner, the better.

The Teacher or staff member who is most closely associated with the details of the Informal Complaint should be contacted. This can be done by phone, email or by arranging an appointment through the School Office. The substance of the matter can be communicated either verbally or in writing or by email or text, as suits the Complainant (but social media posts are not to be used for complaint-making purposes).

18.2. Approach the Principal

If the matter is still unresolved, Complainants are invited to contact the Principal as soon as possible by phone, email or arranging an appointment through the School Office to provide information regarding the matter and the fact that the matter is unresolved.

The Principal will consult with the Complainant and with relevant staff members to collect relevant information regarding the matter. The Principal will conduct an investigation which may include interviews of students, and parents/others as appropriate. The attendance of a support person will be offered. It may be necessary for a mediation meeting to be held with the aim of achieving a resolution. The Principal may, at their discretion, invite the assistance of the Board of Directors, or an external conciliator if appropriate.

The Principal will make best endeavours to resolve the matter amicably and to communicate an outcome to the Complainant, in writing or by email if requested.

19. Making a Formal Complaint (or Converting Initial Complaint into Formal Complaint)

19.1. Write to Board Complaints Committee

If the matter cannot be resolved with the Principal through Initial Complaint channels set out above or if the matter is sufficiently serious or sensitive, the Complainant may choose to request the assistance of the Complaints Committee of the Coast Board of Directors. This is regarded as a "Formal Complaint". The nature and details of the Complaint, and desired outcome should be set out and emailed to boardchair@coastcs.nsw.edu.au.

19.2. The Committee's Initial Response

In the event the Board Chair accepts the Complaint as legitimate and sufficiently substantial as to warrant Board intervention, the Board Chair will convene the Complaints Committee (ie 3 board members least affected by any conflict of interest) and will pass on the Formal Complaint to the Complaints Committee Chair, within 2 business days of receiving notice.

The Complaints Committee Chair will acknowledge receipt in writing or by email of the Complaint within 3 business days of the Committee's receipt.

The Committee will activate its formal Complaints process within 7 business days of the acknowledgement of the Complaint.

Where reasonable in the circumstances and depending on the complexity of the matter, the Committee will endeavour to complete its investigation within 1 month of receipt, or if not complete, will keep the Complainant updated as to anticipated future timeframes for resolution.

If the Board is of the view that the Initial Complaints process has not yet been exhausted, the Board will re-direct the Complainant to follow the Informal Complaint channels.

If the Board regards the matter as vexatious or unsuitable for Board intervention it will communicate its decision to the Complainant and will close the Complaint.

19.3. The Committee's Investigation

The Complaints Committee acts on the Board's behalf to conduct an investigation and makes recommendations to the Board. The Board - as a whole - will make a final determination. The Complaints Committee does not have decision-making power to determine the final outcome of a Complaint nor how it should be managed. Its authority extends only as far as investigating the Complaint and making recommendations to the wider Board.

During the investigation, the Committee will bear in mind the Board's Governance role (not "management" or "operational" role), and will accord principles of natural justice for all concerned.

The Committee Chair – or delegate - may consult with the Principal and the Complainant and others to gain a better understanding of the Complaint.

In investigating a Complaint, it is compulsory for the Complaints Committee to:

- Alert the wider Board as to the existence of a Formal Complaint at the next Board Meeting following receipt of the Complaint
- Keep in reasonable contact with the Complainant to provide progress reports
- Keep the Board updated as to progress

- Communicate recommendations to the Board and invite the Board to consider proposed resolutions

The Committee's Complaints process shall include as far as is relevant in the circumstances:

- Determining a fair process from the outset that accords with principles of procedural fairness and natural justice (including – at an appropriate time – informing any alleged offender of a complaint against them, and inviting their response etc)
- Raising an Investigation Project Plan
- Collecting and analysing relevant information
- Working collaboratively with all involved
- Ascertaining the facts relating to the matter
- Identifying any contributing factors to the matter
- Assessing the matter and determining an evidence-based outcome
- Documenting the investigation report or outcome
- Raising an Outcome Report
- Communication of the Outcomes as appropriate including in writing or by email to the complainant and any others affected by the outcome
- Recording records of the Complaint and investigation processes including interviews etc
- Implement any corrective or preventative action required
- Implement any disciplinary action required
- Determining whether policies or processes should be amended for continuous improvement
- Reporting to external regulators as required
- Monitoring continuous improvement
- Ensuring any training or professional development proceeds as necessary
- Retaining all records for at least 7 years

20. Board Reporting of Complaints

The Board requires the Principal to report at each Board Meeting any substantive Initial Complaints made, along with the approach taken towards resolution and the outcome including any disciplinary action and/or changes in practice required.

21. Records

For Initial Complaints, file notes and/or written records recording all steps taken are to be retained for at least 7 years.

For Formal Complaints, formal records, including File Notes, Interview Transcripts, documented investigation processes etc, are to be retained for at least 7 years.

22. Other Support for Resolving Complaints

The Principal and/or Board may seek professional advice from Industry Associations, investigative experts and/or legal experts or other appropriate providers about the best approach for managing a Complaint.

23. Seeking the Assistance of NESA

A Complainant (whether an individual or organisation) may contact NESA (NSW Education Standards Authority) at any time for advice on how best to raise an issue or proceed with a Complaint.

If a Complainant is not satisfied with the decision of the Coast in the determination of the Complaint, NESA can assist by investigating the Complaint but only if the matter relates to requirements for registration under the *Education Act 1990 (NSW)*.

NESA will seek clear evidence that options for pursuing the Complaint with Coast directly have been exhausted without resolution OR that there is a compelling reason that this would not be appropriate.

Details of how to raise a concern with NESA, and contact information etc, can be found on NESA's website:

<https://rego.nesa.nsw.edu.au/frequently-asked-questions/raising-concerns>

24. Related Policies

- Anti-Bullying (including Cyber Bullying)
- Child Protection Policy (including Code of Conduct)
- Code of Conduct – Staff
- Code of Conduct – Students
- Code of Conduct – Parents and Visitors
- Complaints Handling Procedures – Allegations of Staff Misconduct or Reportable Conduct
- Employment Policy (Disciplinary Provisions)
- Harassment Policy
- Privacy Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- WHS Policy