



# **Complaints and Grievances Policy**

*Foundation for Life*

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Rationale

At Coast Christian School (referred to in this policy as the 'School'), we recognise that from time to time there may be disappointment or dissatisfaction with our services. In School-related matters, 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 the School.

## 1.2 Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this policy is to provide Complainants with an understanding of the approach the School takes to complaint resolution and how together we can aim to achieve a prompt and amicable resolution.

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

It provides for a conciliatory approach and not a legally binding determination of issues raised. The School seeks to avoid the unnecessary escalation of concerns whilst equipping Complainants with an opportunity to be heard, understood, and responded to appropriately and in a timely manner.

Complaints should be communicated to the School in accordance with this Policy.

## 1.3 Whistleblowing Complaints

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

In summary a whistleblowing disclosure is a disclosure which:

- is made by a School 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.

The Whistleblower Policy is publicly available on the School's website:

<https://coastcs.nsw.edu.au/information-and-policies/>.

## 1.4 Guiding Principles

At School, we endeavour to put God first in implementing this Policy and to act in accordance with our Values.

- All Complaints relating to School matters are received by the School in a positive manner and taken seriously.
- Management of Complaints is guided by principles of natural justice and procedural fairness.
- 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, including in relation to handling and storing records.
- All communications relating to a Complaint are to be characterised by courtesy and respect from all involved.
- All parties should approach a Complaint with the intention of resolving concerns and preserving relationships.
- The School takes responsibility for protecting the wellbeing (including physical and psychosocial) of members of the School community, including students and staff.
- Parents have a recognised right to seek access to information about, and clarification of circumstances relating to the education and welfare of students in the School's care.
- Behaviour that does not align with the School's Codes of Conduct will not be tolerated and may result with the termination of engagement with the School in serious circumstances.

## 1.5 Implementation of School Policies

Complaints about reportable conduct will be addressed in accordance with the School's *Child Safe Policy*.

Complaints regarding a grievance between students will be addressed in accordance with the School's *Student Discipline and Behaviour Management Policy, Anti-Bullying and*

*Cyber-Bullying Policy and/or Student Wellbeing Policy and Procedures, where relevant.*

Complaints regarding unlawful discrimination, harassment or bullying between staff are generally addressed in accordance with the school's *Anti-Discrimination, Harassment and Victimisation Policy and Procedures*.

Complaints regarding teacher accreditation processes will be addressed in accordance with the School's *Teacher Accreditation Policy and Procedures*.

Please refer to section 8 of this policy for related policies and procedures.

## 1.6 Distribution of this Policy

This policy is to be provided to all staff, contractors, volunteers and visitors at the School at the time of their engagement and/or employment with the School. It is also to be made publicly available on the School's website: <https://coastcs.nsw.edu.au/information-and-policies/>. School staff are to be given yearly refresher training on this policy. A paper is available from the Office upon request for all School Community Members.

## 1.7 Responsibilities

The School Board is responsible for approving this policy and amendments of it, together with other responsibilities set out below in this policy.

The School Principal is responsible for implementing this policy organisation-wide as set out below in this policy.

All staff, contractors, volunteers and visitors are to abide by this policy.

All School Community Members are to be aware of their obligations under the School's *Complaints Handling Procedures – Allegations of Staff Misconduct or Reportable Conduct* (also published on the School's website).

# 2 Complaints

## 2.1 Overview

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/caregiver 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 of this policy.

If a Complaint that concerns the behaviour of a staff member may constitute reportable conduct, the matter will be addressed by the School's Child Safe Policy in accordance with section 4.2. A Complaint about a reportable conduct matter may be current or historical. Timeframes for investigation of Complaints relating to Reportable Conduct are dependent on the individual matter and may be over an extended period of time, particularly in the case of a historical allegation. The School is bound by privacy or other confidentiality requirements when conducting investigations of reportable conduct allegations, which may limit the information that can be shared with the complainant regarding the outcome of an investigation. Please refer to section 4 of the School's Child Safe 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 or the conduct of an employee, volunteer, contractor or member of the school community may be reported under this policy.

Complaints may be made by a student or parent/carer or any member of the School community.

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.

## 2.2 Examples of Complaints

The types of possible Complaints which could be dealt with under this Policy are limited to School related matters and could include:

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

## 2.3 Allegations of Staff Misconduct or Reportable Conduct

If a complaint relates to an allegation of staff misconduct or reportable conduct, please

also refer to the School's related procedure, *Complaints Handling Procedures regarding allegations of staff misconduct or reportable conduct*.

## 3 Raising a Complaint

### 3.1 The Complainant

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 Principal or Deputy Principal. Any complaint about the conduct of a staff member should be raised directly with the Principal in the first instance.

Should the matter not be resolved between the parties directly in the first instance, the complainant may raise the matter with the School. A complaint can be made in writing to the Principal, via email: [principal@coastcs.nsw.edu.au](mailto:principal@coastcs.nsw.edu.au).

Where a person wishes to make a complaint concerning the Principal, the complaint should be made in writing to the Chair of the School Board, via email: [boardchair@coastcs.nsw.edu.au](mailto:boardchair@coastcs.nsw.edu.au). In this situation, the references in this policy relating to the role of the Principal should be read as references to the Chair of the School Board.

### 3.2 The School

The Principal will generally acknowledge receipt of a formal Complaint (see section 5 below) raised with the School in writing as soon as practicable.

## 4 Informal Complaints

An Informal Complaint is a matter which can be resolved either by relevant School staff and/or the Principal. This provides opportunity for issues, that may often be misunderstandings, to be handled outside a formal process.

An Informal Complaint may be converted to a Formal Complaint if the matter is still not resolved after the Informal Complaint processes below are exhausted. See 'Formal Complaints' in section 5.

### 4.1 Communicate with Relevant Staff Member

The School 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. Complainants may choose whether they

communicate the substance of the matter verbally or in writing, by email (social media posts are not to be used for complaint-making purposes) or by arranging an appointment through the School Office.

#### **4.1.1 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, School recommends that parents first approach the relevant teacher for assistance with a concern about another student and/or parent (as an Informal Complaint). 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 School Community Members etc when considering their intended approach.

#### **4.1.2 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 Code of Conduct for School Community Members should be followed at all times and any behaviour which does not align may be cause for disciplinary action.

#### **4.1.3 Concerns about the Principal – All School Community Members**

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](mailto:boardchair@coastcs.nsw.edu.au) – as noted in 3.1 above. This includes any concerns raised which related to the manner in which the Principal has acted from an operational or management perspective.

Where appropriate, the Board Chair will firstly consult with the Deputy Principal and/or Business Manager. Unless, after consultation the Board Chair determined the Complaint to be totally without merit or that it cannot be resolved satisfactorily at a 'one-on-one' meeting with the Principal, the Board Chair will raise the matter at the next appropriate Board meeting. The Board will determine how to address the Complaint following Board procedures which may include seeking any appropriate external advice.

#### **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](mailto:boardchair@coastcs.nsw.edu.au)).

The Code of Conduct for School Community Members should be followed at all times.

## 5 Formal Complaints

### 5.1 Making a Formal Complaint

If the matter is unresolved through informal processes and/or requires a Formal Complaint to be made (such as Staff Misconduct or Reportable Conduct – see the School's *Complaints Handling Procedures – Allegations of Staff Misconduct or Reportable Conduct* (on the School's website), Complainants are invited to contact the Principal as soon as possible by phone, email: [principal@coastcs.nsw.edu.au](mailto:principal@coastcs.nsw.edu.au) or by arranging an appointment through the School Office to provide information regarding the matter and, if relevant, the fact that the matter is unresolved.

### 5.2 Assessing a Complaint

The Principal (or delegate) generally will assess the Complaint and determine:

- whether the Complaint is one to be addressed under this policy as a complaint or as a staff grievance or reportable conduct matter, or another matter identified in section 1.5 above which are dealt with by the relevant policies (see section 1.5); 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 Office of the Children's Guardian, Police, Department of Communities and Justice or other relevant authorities should the Complaint relate to possible unlawful conduct or other reportable matters.

Generally, the Principal or delegate will consult with the Complainant and with relevant staff members to collect relevant information regarding the matter. If deemed a Formal Complaint under this policy, the Principal will conduct an investigation which may include interviews of students, and parents/others as appropriate. Appropriate records are to be maintained by the Principal or delegate and the following steps followed.

### 5.3 Managing a Complaint

The Principal (or delegate) generally will manage a 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'); and
- e) if appropriate, advising the Complainant in writing, and any other relevant parties as appropriate, of the resolution decision of the Principal (or delegate) and if appropriate, any proposed action to be taken.
- f) Maintaining appropriate records, including notations on student files.

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.

It may be necessary for a mediation meeting to be held with the aim of achieving a resolution decision. The Principal may, at their discretion, invite the assistance of the Board of Directors, or an external conciliator if appropriate.

## 5.4 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 safe issues or Complaints about behaviour which places others at risk of harm etc - in which case follow the steps outlined in our Child Safe or other relevant policies. Concerns of this nature relating to the Principal, should be immediately referred to the Board Chair at [boardchair@coastcs.nsw.edu.au](mailto:boardchair@coastcs.nsw.edu.au).

## 5.5 Concerns about the Board Chair or Other Board Members

Any School-related concerns relating to the Board Chair or other Board Members can be made to the Company Secretary (who can be contacted via; [secretary@coastcs.nsw.edu.au](mailto:secretary@coastcs.nsw.edu.au)).

## 5.6 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.

## 6 Records

File notes and/or written records recording all steps taken are to be retained for at least 7 years. For Formal Complaints, this documentation includes formal records, including File Notes, Interview Transcripts, documented investigation processes etc.

## 7 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.

## 8 Related Policies

Anti-Bullying (including Cyber Bullying)

Anti-Discrimination, Harassment and Victimisation Policy and Procedures

Child Safe Policy (including Code of Conduct)

Code of Conduct – Students

Code of Conduct – School Community Members

Complaints Handling Procedures – Allegations of Staff Misconduct or Reportable Conduct

Employment Policy (Disciplinary Provisions)

Staff Discipline Policy

Privacy Policy

Whistleblowing Policy

WHS Policy