



Pittwater House

## 6.7 Student and Parent Grievance Policy

### Introduction

Pittwater House values the feedback it receives from parents, students and the community. Responding to both affirmative and negative feedback demonstrates the School's commitment to open communication with the School Community and the community at large. Complaints about any aspect of the School's operations, service or personnel will be handled using procedural fairness, responsively, openly and in a timely manner, with the aim of resolving any complaint via an articulated process and respecting the confidential nature of such matters. Complaints are treated as constructive suggestions which may be used to improve standards and may prevent cause for further complaint.

### 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 complaint concerning the behaviour of a staff member may constitute reportable conduct, the matter will be addressed in accordance with the School's *Child Protection Policy 6.11* and *Child Protection Procedure 6.12*. 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 may be reported under this policy.

Complaints may be made by a student or parent/guardian and will be treated with equal respect.

### Purpose

This policy is designed to:

- Use where appropriate, procedural fairness
- improve the level of stakeholder satisfaction with the School
- recognise, promote and protect stakeholders' rights, including the right to comment and complain
- ensure that children with grievances are treated with respect, listened to, and taken seriously
- provide an efficient, fair and accessible mechanism for resolving complaints in accordance with the principles of natural justice
- ensure that the complaint handling process is transparent and comprehensive.

This policy does not extend to complaints which are whistleblowing disclosures. The procedures for processing whistleblowing complaints are dealt with in the *Whistleblowing Policy (6.13)*. This policy applies only to handling complaints made in respect of services provided by the school or against staff members (including employees, contractors and volunteers). It does not extend to personal grievances between parents, guardians or other members of the school community.

## Related Policies

Complaints about reportable conduct will be addressed in accordance with the School's *Child Protection Policy 6.11* and *Child Protection Procedure 6.12*.

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, will be addressed in accordance with the School's *Staff Grievance Procedure 4.17*.

Complaints regarding unlawful discrimination, harassment or bullying between staff are generally addressed in accordance with the School's *Unlawful Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying Statement 4.18*.

## Principles

Responsiveness and procedural fairness are the key. Complaints need to be resolved openly and responsibly. It is expected that all complaints will be acknowledged and resolved in a timely manner. The process and timeframes for resolution will vary depending on the nature, complexity and timing of the issue. Children's voices are listened to and taken seriously.

## Procedural Fairness

The process needs to be fair to both the complainant and the person/s against whom the complaint is being made. All parties must be protected from victimisation, discrimination or retribution. The needs of children, people with disabilities, and neuro-diverse people will be considered as part of the process. The process is to be based on the principles of natural justice, including the complainant's right to:

- be heard
- have their complaint treated seriously
- be informed of the processes of complaints handling
- be informed of the School's decision and reasons for that decision

The person or section of the School about whom the complaint is made shall have the right to:

- in most cases, be advised of the identity of the complainant and the complaint, unless a risk assessment recommends otherwise
- collect sufficient detail to enable them to gather information and prepare a response to the complaint
- have the opportunity to respond to the person investigating the complaint and have the response taken seriously
- be informed of the processes engaged in the complaints handling
- be informed of the decision and reason for the decision.

The Principal/Delegate will manage a formal complaint by

- advising the complainant of the likely steps that will be undertaken by the School in relation to the complaint
- if appropriate, advising the relevant parties of the complaint at the relevant time and provided them with an opportunity to respond
- collecting any additional information the School considers necessary to assess the complaint
- making a decision about how the complaint will be resolved

- advising the complainant in writing (or any other manner necessary to suit the age and needs of the complainant), and any other relevant parties as appropriate, of the decision 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.

It is important that those handling complaints should be independent of the issue of the complaint. If a conflict of interest arises for the staff member involved in the receipt or management of a complaint, the Head of School will arrange for an independent staff member to continue with the process and hear the complaint. If the complaint involves a Head of School, they will inform the Principal. If the complaint involves the Principal, she will inform the Chairman of the School Council.

### **Confidentiality**

To protect confidentiality and privacy, all staff involved in handling complaints resolution must ensure that information is restricted only to those who genuinely need to know in order to deal with the complaint. This confidentiality also extends to handling and storage of records. Some information about the specific complaint may need to be disclosed to others during its resolution. The complainant needs to be informed of this.

### **Processes**

It is important that the initial process of handling complaints is supportive and utilises positive conflict resolution skills. Each complaint should be treated on the information available and actions that are appropriate to the individual complaint. Complaints may be made by a student or a parent/guardian. Complaints made by a student will be taken seriously and addressed appropriately, with regard given to the age and needs of the child. Anonymous complaints will not be recognised or dealt with under this policy.

### **Procedures for Raising a Concern or Making a Complaint**

Pittwater House School acknowledges that concerns and issues exist that may be resolved informally without the need to follow a formal complaints process. In such cases complainants are encouraged initially to raise issues or concerns informally with the relevant person at the time of the issue arising. Discussing the issue or concern immediately and face-to-face may clarify the situation and resolve any misunderstandings satisfactorily. 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 according to the processes below:

### **Outline of Complaint Procedures**

- Where possible and appropriate, a complaint should be first raised informally with the person concerned. Note this does not apply to matters of reportable conduct which should be dealt with in accordance with the *Child Protection Policy 6.11* and *Child Protection Procedure 6.12*.
- If the matter is not resolved then complainants should approach their Form Teachers, Classroom Teachers or the School Counsellors.

- In the event that this does not resolve the issue, the complainant should then contact the relevant Senior Staff member, in the case of Academic Matters then the Faculty Coordinator, student wellbeing matters with the Junior School Wellbeing Coordinator or the senior school Stage Coordinator, co-curricular matters with the Coordinator of Performing Arts or the Coordinator of Dance and Drama, or the Director of Sport and Co-curricular Activities (for all sporting & co-curricular matters).
- If there is still a concern, then the person making the complaint should approach:
  - Junior School – The Assistant Head of Junior School, then if required, the Head of Junior School
  - Secondary School – The appropriate Year or Stage Coordinator, then if required, the Head of School for student wellbeing matters or the Deputy Principal for Academic matters.
- If the complaint is against the Principal, then the complaint should be put in writing and addressed to the Chair of the Board.

**Complaints received by Members of the Board** must be referred to the Chair, who will, where appropriate, discuss the matter/s with the Principal. Positive resolution of a complaint should aim to:

- seek resolution at the level at which the complaint is made
- gain agreement of the parties
- consider all relevant information and views of all parties
- consider the School's policies

The management of complaints resolution needs to reflect the following:

- Complainants should be told the process for complaint resolution and an indication of how long it will take to deal with a complaint
- Complainants should be kept informed of progress on resolving the complaint where relevant
- It is expected that written complaints will be acknowledged within 7 days of receipt. The proposed timeframe required to resolve the complaint should be indicated to the complainant as early as possible in the process and may vary according to the nature, complexity or timing of the complaint.

### **Overseas Student Complaints against Planned Actions (Appeals)**

General complaints should be first raised informally with the Overseas Student Coordinator as per the **Outline of Complaint Procedures**.

Where a complaint regards a planned action of the school including but not limited to cancellation of enrolment due to a notice of Intention to Report due to Unsatisfactory Attendance or a notice of Intention to Report due to Unsatisfactory Course Progress:

- the school commits to maintain the enrolment whilst the complaint is considered.
- the complaint must be lodged within the timeframe for appeal which will be detailed in the original notice or letter advising of the schools planned action against which the complaint is being made.

Where the outcome of a complaint against planned action is unsatisfactory to the complainant, an appeal may be presented to the Overseas Students Ombudsman. Any costs associated will be the responsibility of Pittwater House.

This policy does not take away the complainant's rights to take further action under Australia's consumer protection laws.

### **Record Keeping**

All complaints which cannot be resolved informally will be confidentially recorded by the staff member handling the complaint and kept on the relevant file/s. Details should include:

- The nature of the complaint
- Dates and names of parties concerned
- Staff members involved in handling the complaint
- Action taken and outcomes

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