



# PARENT GRIEVANCE POLICY AND PROCEDURE

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## PURPOSE

It is recognised that, from time to time, complaints may be received by the School from parents and caregivers in our community. This policy sets out guidelines and processes by which such matters can be addressed respectfully, fairly, in a non-adversarial manner, expeditiously and with sensitivity to all concerned.

This policy does not address complaints relating to staff employment matters or grievances. These are managed through appropriate statutory provisions and the School's Workplace Grievance Policy.

The policy and procedures which follow seek to provide for the resolution of complaints by parents. For the purposes of this policy a 'complaint' can arise if a parent believes, in good faith and with supporting information that the School has, for example:

- done something wrong
- failed to do something that it should have done
- acted unfairly, unreasonably, inappropriately or unprofessionally.

## POLICY AND PROCEDURE DETAIL

Willunga Waldorf School is committed to:

- Working in partnership with parents, delivering education and care of the highest quality.
- Ensuring that the School is a safe and fair place in which to work and study.
- Actively promoting the development of positive and respectful relationships and seeking to minimise the incidence of conflict that might otherwise give rise to a complaint.
- Encouraging, wherever possible, the resolution of complaints, if and when they arise, at the school level.
- Supporting the right of parents to have their complaints listened to, taken seriously, in good faith and to be addressed and resolved fairly, reasonably and expeditiously.
- Complying with all relevant statutory and legal requirements. These include for example, but are not limited to: anti-discrimination and vilification laws, child protection laws and Family Court orders.

### 1. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- 1.1. Parents are entitled to lodge a genuine complaint with the School. This means that complaints should be lodged in good faith and without frivolous, malicious or vexatious intent.
- 1.2. Every reasonable effort will be made by the School and its representatives to ensure that a parent who lodges a complaint or anyone dealing with or involved in the complaint will not be treated unfairly, victimised, coerced or intimidated.



- 1.3. Communication and resolution processes should always be based on the parties acting in good faith, exercising good judgement, being honest and open, and focusing on the issue and not the person(s).
- 1.4. Each complaint is to be dealt with on its particular circumstances and merits and any settlements reached or determinations made through the resolution process will not necessarily constitute any binding precedent for future or similar cases.
- 1.5. In responding to a complaint, informally or formally, every reasonable effort shall be made to ensure that natural justice and procedural fairness are afforded to all parties. This means, in practical terms, that:
  - 1.5.1. All parties are entitled to be treated with respect and to be heard.
  - 1.5.2. All parties should participate fully in the resolution process to achieve an outcome that is realistic and reasonable.
- 1.6. A person who is the subject of a complaint should be informed of the substance thereof and given a full opportunity to present their perspective.
- 1.7. All parties have a right to seek advice and support.
- 1.8. Investigations and proceedings must be conducted fairly, thoroughly and without bias or undue delay.
- 1.9. Parties should provide all relevant, material, complete and factual information, documents or other evidence relating to the complaint.

## **2. INFORMAL RESOLUTION OF COMPLAINTS WHEREVER POSSIBLE**

- 2.1 Many complaints may be minor in nature, or readily resolved, and often arise from genuine misunderstandings and/or issues relating to communication. In the vast majority of cases, these can be satisfactorily resolved informally.
- 2.2 The School encourages and supports complainants, wherever possible and as soon as practicable after a matter becomes of concern, to seek to resolve a complaint in an informal and amicable manner. This is best done through direct communication/discussion by and between the parties themselves (e.g. a parent and teacher).
- 2.3 Formal procedures for the resolution of complaints should only be invoked when a matter is of a very serious nature and/or cannot be resolved by the parties themselves through informal means.

## **3. FORMAL AND SERIOUS COMPLAINTS**

- 3.1 Complaints that cannot otherwise be resolved pursuant to 2.1 and 2.2 above or are of a serious nature may be referred to or should be lodged formally and in writing with the appropriate staff in the following categories:
  - Faculty Coordinator
  - Head of School
- 3.2 In such instances, a parent may also seek advice or clarification from any of the aforementioned staff about the appropriate person(s) in the School to whom the concern or complaint might best be directed.



- 3.3 As soon as practicable after a formal written complaint has been lodged, a process will be put in place by the School to investigate the complaint.
- 3.4 The investigative process in relation to a formal complaint will include but not necessarily be limited to gathering relevant and material information relating to the complaint and meetings convened of the parties to discuss the complaint and to seek a resolution. If a resolution can't be found, a determination will be made by the School, based on thorough investigation, as to whether or not to uphold the complaint.
- 3.5 If the complaint is substantiated, the evidence is inconclusive or if the complaint is found to not be substantiated, all parties will be formally advised accordingly, along with any follow up counselling or other actions as the parties agree and/or the School deems appropriate and necessary in all the circumstances.

#### **4. REFERRAL OF COMPLAINT TO SCHOOL COUNCIL**

- 4.1 Generally, the Chair of School Council and members of the School Council are not directly involved in the first instance with the receipt, investigation or resolution of complaints other than complaints arising within or about the School Council itself.
- 4.2 In instances where a complaint is about the Head of School or Business Manager, a person may, if they feel the matter cannot otherwise be resolved or feels it is appropriate to do so, lodge a formal complaint with the Chair of School Council. In turn, and in consultation with the Complainant, the Chair of School Council will expeditiously take all reasonable steps to have the complaint fully investigated and to facilitate a resolution.
- 4.3 In other exceptional and special circumstances, a parent may make a direct approach to the Chair of School Council to bring his/her attention to a matter of concern, to formally lodge a complaint or refer a complaint where the resolution processes within the School have failed or are otherwise inappropriate. In such instances, the Chair of Council will take advice from appropriate persons and make a determination as to how the complaint should thereafter be effectively dealt with.

#### **5. REFERRAL OF COMPLAINT TO AN EXTERNAL AUTHORITY**

- 5.1 When a complaint is not or cannot be resolved within the School, the parties may seek the assistance of external professional agencies or other relevant judicial or quasi-judicial bodies in order that a further attempt can be made to resolve the matter. This is subject to the important provisions set out in 5.2 and 5.3.
- 5.2 The Association of Independent Schools of South Australia (AISSA) will not act as a mediator between parents and schools but if a matter remains unresolved, or parents feel that the school has failed to take their complaint seriously, AISSA may be able to provide general assistance to help parents understand the School's position.
- 5.3 The South Australian Minister for Education has no power or authority over the day to day operation of independent schools and therefore will not receive or consider any referral of a complaint regarding Willunga Waldorf School.



## **6. CONFIDENTIALITY, DISCRETION AND THE SCHOOL'S DUTY OR OBLIGATION TO NOTIFY**

- 6.1 If a parent chooses to make a complaint without disclosing their identity, this will limit the options for proper and thorough investigation and resolution. It also raises issues in relation to procedural fairness for those who have a complaint made about them as they have a right to know the particulars of the complaint and to respond. The School therefore cannot guarantee that anonymous complaints can or will be dealt with. Complainants are always encouraged to identify themselves.
- 6.2 As far as possible and appropriate, due discretion will be respected and maintained by all parties throughout the resolution process, save where persons are required to be informed on a 'need to know' basis or where investigative, statutory or legal requirements stipulate that matters be disclosed, reported or discussed. Therefore, there can be no overriding legal obligation or right with respect to confidentiality.
- 6.3 Where complaints are made in circumstances where an alleged crime may have been committed or the matter falls under the Reporting Abuse and Neglect provisions, the Police or similar outside agencies (e.g. Child Abuse Report Line) will be contacted and formally advised.

## **7. WITHDRAWAL OF A COMPLAINT**

- 7.1 A parent may withdraw a complaint at any stage of the resolution process. If a complaint is withdrawn, the matter will be deemed to be closed, unless the School, at its discretion and in all the circumstances, wishes to continue to address a matter raised.

## **8. RECORD KEEPING BY THE SCHOOL**

- 8.1 Accurate, appropriate and secure records will be kept at the School on its Complaints Register by the person(s) responsible for overseeing or managing the resolution process for a particular complaint. The Complaints Register is kept and managed by the Head of School.

## **9. DISTRIBUTION OF THIS POLICY**

- 9.1 This Policy, and any changes or updates thereto, is made available to all staff and parents of the School.



## RESOLVING COMPLAINTS FROM PARENTS

