



GOV001 – GRIEVANCE POLICY AND PROCEDURES (PARENTS)

POLICY CONTEXT

Willunga Waldorf School is a co-educational and gender-inclusive school. The School's mission is to provide Steiner education from early childhood to year 12, based on the work of Rudolf Steiner. This education is driven by a deep understanding and respect for the developing and unfolding human being.

Connectedness and partnership with parents, caregivers and the wider community is one of our core values, and the School seeks to be a safe, just, compassionate, responsive and inclusive place for all.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

Willunga Waldorf School recognises that, from time to time, complaints may be received by the School from parents/legal guardians 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, promptly and with sensitivity to all concerned.

This policy and procedures which follow seek to provide for the resolution of complaints by parents/legal guardians. This policy does not address complaints relating to staff employment matters or grievances. These are managed through appropriate statutory provisions and the School's GOV 002 Grievance Policy (Staff).

DEFINITION

A **complaint** or **grievance** is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived situation, outcome or decision. The dissatisfaction may be based on a perception that the School has:

- Done something wrong;
- Failed to do something it should have; or
- Acted unfairly or unreasonably.

POLICY STATEMENT

Willunga Waldorf School is committed to:

- Working in partnership with parents/legal guardians, 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/legal guardians to have their complaints listened to, taken seriously, in good faith and to be addressed and resolved fairly, reasonably and promptly.
- Complying with all relevant statutory and legal requirements.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Parents/legal guardians 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.
2. Every reasonable effort will be made by the School and its representatives to ensure that a parent/legal guardian who lodges a complaint or anyone dealing with or involved in the complaint will not be treated unfairly, victimised, coerced or intimidated.
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).
4. Each complaint is to be dealt with on its particular circumstances and merits; determinations made through the resolution process will not necessarily constitute any binding precedent for future or similar cases.
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:
 - All parties are entitled to be treated with respect and to be heard.
 - All parties should participate fully in the resolution process to achieve an outcome that is realistic and reasonable.
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.
7. All parties have a right to seek advice and support.
8. Investigations and proceedings must be conducted fairly, thoroughly and without bias or undue delay.
9. Parties should provide all relevant, material, complete and factual information, documents or other evidence relating to the complaint.

PROCEDURES

(See also Appendix A *Parent Complaint Procedure* flowchart)

1. INFORMAL RESOLUTION OF COMPLAINTS WHEREVER POSSIBLE

- 1.1 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.
- 1.2 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/legal guardian and teacher).

- 1.3 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.

2. FORMAL AND SERIOUS COMPLAINTS

- 2.1 Complaints that cannot otherwise be resolved pursuant to 1.1 and 1.2 above, or that 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 Leader
 - Head of School
- 2.2 In such instances, a parent/legal guardian 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.
- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 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 cannot be found, a determination will be made by the School, based on thorough investigation, as to whether or not to uphold the complaint.
- 2.5 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.

3. REFERRAL OF COMPLAINT TO SCHOOL COUNCIL

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 In other exceptional and special circumstances, a parent may make a direct approach to the Chair of School Council to bring their 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.

4. REFERRAL OF COMPLAINT TO AN EXTERNAL AUTHORITY

- 4.1 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 4.2 and 4.3.
- 4.2 The Association of Independent Schools of South Australia (AISSA) will not act as a mediator between parents/legal guardians and schools. However, if a matter remains unresolved or parents/legal guardians feel that the School has failed to take their complaint seriously, AISSA may be able to provide general assistance to help parents/legal guardians understand the School's position.
- 4.3 It is important to note that neither the Minister for Education, Training and Skills nor the Department for Education has any power to directly intervene in any complaints relating to the operations of a Non-Government School. This includes Willunga Waldorf School.

5. CONFIDENTIALITY, DISCRETION AND THE SCHOOL'S DUTY OR OBLIGATION TO NOTIFY

- 5.1 If a parent/legal guardian 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 a right to respond. The School therefore cannot guarantee that anonymous complaints can or will be dealt with. Complainants are always encouraged to identify themselves.
- 5.2 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.
- 5.3 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 SA Police or similar outside agencies (e.g. Child Abuse Report Line) will be contacted and formally advised.

6. ANGRY AND AGGRESSIVE COMPLAINANTS

6.1 The School will manage angry and aggressive complainants by:

- Ensuring the safety and wellbeing of staff and students present during an interview. This may involve terminating the interview if necessary;
- Listening attentively;
- Insisting that courteous behaviour is required at all times;
- Remaining calm;



- Showing empathy with the complainant's emotions;
- Giving due consideration to the complainant's concerns, even if you consider they have a particular motive;
- Taking notes on each point raised without defensive comment, repeating them to the complainant and asking whether the notes represent an accurate record of the allegations; and
- Where appropriate, arranging for another member of the Leadership Team to be present during a meeting with the Head of School.

7. WITHDRAWAL OF A COMPLAINT

- 7.1 A parent/legal guardian 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 considering 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. STAFF TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 9.1 The School authorizes various staff to handle complaints. The School will ensure that those staff will receive appropriate professional development in handling complaints, including on policy and procedures, and privacy obligations.

- 9.2 Training will include the following topics:

- Complaints procedures;
- Active listening;
- Questioning and negotiation skills;
- Mediation;
- Observation, recording and reporting skills; and
- Privacy legislation.

10. DISTRIBUTION OF THIS POLICY

- 10.1 This policy, and any changes or updates thereto, is made available to all staff and parents/legal guardians of the School.



RELATED POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND DOCUMENTS

Related School Policies, Procedures and Guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SF001 – Professional Code of Conduct • GOV005 – Privacy Policy • HS003 – Personal Responsibility Policy and Procedures (Behaviour Education and Support) • HS004 – Bullying and Harassment Prevention Policy
Related Legislation and Regulatory Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017 (SA) • Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) • Education and Children's Services Act 2019 (SA) • Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (SA) • State Government Funding Deed

VARIATION AND REVIEW

The School reserves the right to vary, replace or terminate this policy from time to time. Unless altered earlier, this policy will be reviewed every three (3) years.

Responsible Person	Head of School		
Policy Approver	Leadership Group		
Version	1.1		
Publication Date	June 2013 (version 1.0)	Effective Date:	June 2013
Review Date	May/Aug 2023	Effective Date:	04.09. 2023
Next Review Date	August 2026		
Revision Record	<p>Antje Guenther (HR), May 2023:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Minor language updates, including adding "guardian" whenever "parent" is mentioned - Added Policy Context - Reformatted document - At AISSA's recommendation, clarified legislative context - At AISSA's recommendation, added: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Section Angry and Aggressive Complainants o Section Staff Training and Development o Section Variation and Review <p>Sharon Miller (BM), Aug 2023:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Redefining of grievance / complaint and language updates for greater clarity - Renaming of Appendix A flowchart to "Parent Grievance Procedure" - Update to legislative requirements and related documents 		



Appendix A

Parent Complaint Procedure

