



Complaints Policy

Purpose:	The purpose of the Complaints Policy is to outline procedures for dealing with complaints within the School as quickly as possible after they arise.		
Scope:	This policy applies to staff, volunteers, parents/carers, students and members of the public, and describes the step by step procedures to follow upon receiving a complaint.		
Status:	Authorised	Supersedes: Complaints Policy 20180523.1	
Authorised by:	School Board	Date of Authorisation: 16.01.20	
References:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaints Resolution Policy • Child Protection Policy • Anti-Harassment Policy • Anti-bullying Policy • Behaviour Management Policy • Privacy Policy 		
Definitions:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaint - an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem. A complaint may be made if a parent/carer, student, staff member, volunteer, or a member of the public thinks that the School has, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>done something wrong;</i> ○ <i>failed to do something it should have done; or</i> ○ <i>acted unfairly or impolitely.</i> <p>A Complaint may be made about the school, as a whole, a specific department in the school or an individual member of staff.</p>		
Review Period:	Every two years	Next Review Date: T1, 2021	Policy Owner: School Board

POLICY

RATIONALE

Problems are likely to arise if parents/carers, students, staff members, volunteers, or a member of the public feel that the School is not open to their concerns. It is better to have a direct complaint to a member of staff than to have parents or students sharing their dissatisfaction with others. Parents and students like to feel valued and involved with the school and they should be encouraged to voice their concerns. This is more likely to occur where the culture of the school is open, and complaints are received in a positive manner.

An expression of concern, or a simple query, may grow into a painful matter if parent/carer or student, staff member, volunteer, or a member of the public feel they have been brushed aside. Equally, issues with the potential to become acutely difficult may dwindle and fade if they are handled well at the initial stage.

The key principles for the handling of complaints are:

- *The school is open to the concerns of parents/carers, students, staff members, volunteers, or members of the public*
- *Complaints are received in a positive manner.*

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- Parents/carers, students, staff members, volunteers, or members of the public *can expect to be taken seriously and can approach any member of staff about their concerns.*
- *Information about complaints is clear and readily available.*
- *Concerns are dealt with speedily and those who have raised them are kept informed about progress.*
- *It is not acceptable for students to receive adverse treatment because they or their parents/carers have raised a complaint.*
- *Clear confidential files and a log are kept.*
- *Confidentiality is respected and maintained so far as is possible.*
- *Resolution of the matter is sought.*
- *Staff & School Board training covers the handling of complaints.*

The school will ensure that all members of staff and School Board have appropriate training in handling complaints on induction, annually and as required throughout the year. Training will cover:

- the complaints procedure
- communication skills, such as listening, questioning and calming
- handling complaints, negotiation and mediation skills
- skills in observing, recording and reporting
- the benefits of handling complaints well and the consequences of handling them badly.

PARENTAL COMPLAINTS

If a parent/carer, has a complaint the staff member, should deal quickly and honestly with the complaint if the staff member feels confident to do so. Such a complaint might be in relation to for eg.: a subject grade, perceived unfair treatment of a late assignment, and so on.

If the staff member does not feel confident about handling the complaint, the staff member should consult with the Principal.

If the complaint is about an area that lies outside the staff members responsibility the staff member should report it to the Principal immediately.

Matters incapable of resolution at a particular level should be referred to the appropriate senior person. For example, a complaint made to a relatively junior member of staff about a more senior colleague.

Senior staff will recognise when issues need to go straight to the Principal, with whom the responsibility for most complaints lie.

Certain parents/carers will wish to go straight to the Principal with their concerns, and this should be respected. However, it should be explained that the Principal might not be able to respond until he/she has consulted the staff members who can assist.

The Principal will share serious complaints with the-School Board. If a serious complaint is about the Principal, parents/carers, may write directly to the School Board, via email to chair@biralisteiner.qld.edu.au.

If a staff or board member receive a complaint and decide to respond to the parent or carer in writing, staff or board member should discuss their response with the Principal, who may co-sign the response.

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Make sure you, the staff or board member are clear about the nature of the complaint before responding. If it is not immediately obvious:

- the parent or carer may need more time to explain;
- parent or carer may be asked to put their complaint in writing;
- it may be helpful to discuss possible outcomes.

ALL COMPLAINTS NEED TO BE HANDLED SERIOUSLY.

It is the policy of the school that all complaints will be acknowledged as soon as possible. Birali has developed an online Feedback submission form that ensures complaints are acknowledged promptly and delegated to the correct staff member or the school board for action. Please refer to the Complaints Resolution System for full details on the complaints procedure, including expected timeframes for responses.

RECORDING

A log, recording complaints, is kept electronically. It is important that staff or board members record the details of the complaint accurately as:

- it may become the cause of legal action in the future;
- patterns in the record may indicate a need for action; and
- the Principal should be able to check the log and report on it regularly to the School Board.

The log should contain the following information:

- date when the issue was raised
- name of complaint provider
- name of student if applicable
- brief statement of issue
- location of detailed file
- member of staff handling the issue
- brief statement of outcome.

These files are **CONFIDENTIAL** and are only to be accessed by staff members of the school as authorised by the Principal. The files should contain simple clear notes of all conversations with parents, etc. where appropriate, about sources of dissatisfaction. This applies to chats and to telephone conversations, where appropriate, as misunderstandings easily arise. There should be a clear statement of what is concerning the complainant/s. If appropriate, the notes can be confirmed with the complainant/s and agreed upon with signatures for confirmation of accuracy.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality is an important issue for students, parents, School Board and staff. It is essential that any complaint is treated in a confidential manner and with respect.

Parents often seek an assurance of confidentiality before expressing their concerns. If, for example, they wish to discuss a particular member of staff, they may fear that their child will suffer in some way because they have complained.

It should be made clear to all concerned that it is the school's policy that complaints made by parents should not rebound adversely on their children and similarly that complaints raised by students should not rebound on them or on other students.

The question of confidentiality should be discussed sensitively and on an individual basis with the parents etc and the school's policy should be carefully explained.

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It may be possible to deal with a problem without naming individuals. However, even if no names are given, the source of the complaint may be clear. Depending on the nature of the complaint and on the circumstances, it may be impractical to investigate without identifying the member of staff or the child – it may also be in the interest of the child to do so.

Members of staff are rightly concerned that they should know about complaints that might be damaging to their reputation. Such complaints will be known only to themselves and to those who must be consulted. The school will provide support for staff against whom a complaint is made, upon request; this will be provided by a colleague who is not otherwise involved.

If there is a situation involving the Police, the Principal, will take responsibility for action in the school and the School Board will be informed as soon as possible.

ANONYMOUS COMPLAINTS

Anonymous complaints may be where there is no indication of either name or address, or where the complainants say that they do not wish to be identified. They may come from members of the public, from parents or from students.

Complaints from the public about the behaviour of a group of students will be dealt with on a general basis, with reminders to all about the school's expectations.

Parents and students should be encouraged to give their names and should be given reassurance on the issue of confidentiality. If they persist in wishing to remain anonymous, it is at the Principal's discretion as to what action, if any, should be taken, depending on the nature of the complaint.

Anonymous complaints will be recorded in the log.

Anonymous allegations about child abuse should be dealt with as outlined in the school's Child Protection Policy.

Parents and students may be satisfied the situation has been resolved by any of the following:

- knowing that changes have been made, and that matters will be different in future
- knowing that the school is now alert to a possible problem
- feeling that their concern has been considered seriously
- an outcome which may be different from the one they sought, but which they perceive to be well-considered
- a considered letter
- an apology

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INTRACTABLE COMPLAINTS

There may be a small minority of persistent or aggressive complainants that will never be satisfied, whatever the school does. The school may even discover on investigation that the complaint was without foundation or motivated by malice. Nevertheless, it is wise to treat all complaints seriously and to follow the procedures.

Most complaints can be resolved if approached positively. If a complaint becomes intractable, it may be due to its nature or to the way in which it was handled, or possibly because the parent/person perceives the school to have 'closed ranks' against him or her.

There are different stages of action to be taken with intractable complaints:

Referral to the School Board

In most cases, the procedure will be that the Principal refers the matter to the School Board and informs the parents/persons that this stage has been reached. However, a situation may arise where the complaint seems to the parent/person to have been mishandled by the Principal. In those circumstances, the parent/person can write direct to the School Board, via email chair@biralisteiner.qld.edu.au.

The School Board will discuss the matter at a Board meeting fully with the Principal and provide relevant instructions/documentation. If a briefing is required from a member of staff, this will occur in the presence of the Principal.

The School Board will respond to the parents/persons, notifying them that they are reviewing the matter, asking them if they wish to add anything further and providing a date by which they may expect a response.

The School Board may be able to offer a new approach to the matter, and this may satisfy the parents/persons. The School Board's response will be clear, detailed, and will offer a meeting if the parents remain troubled.

MEETING WITH THE SCHOOL BOARD

If a meeting is requested, the School Board will offer to meet the parents/person at a time convenient to them. Those involved are:

- a nominated Conciliation Officer from the School Board,
- the Principal, and
- one other Staff member
- the parents/persons

Parents/persons are encouraged to bring with them a supportive friend who is not involved with the complaint. Legal representation is not appropriate at this stage.

The Conciliation Officer, after questioning and listening to the parents/persons and the Principal, and even if required further discussion with whole School Board may be able to find a solution. If this is not possible, and the parents/persons wish to take the matter further, the School Board may consider seeking the advice of an independent arbitrator.

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Please refer to the Complaints Resolution System for the full complaints procedure.