



# Complaints Resolution System (Feedback)

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<b>Purpose:</b> To outline to processes to be taken for complaints resolution at Birali Steiner School.			
<b>Scope:</b> Students and employees, including full-time, part-time, permanent, fixed-term and casual employees, as well as contractors, volunteers and people undertaking work experience or vocational placements.			
<b>Status:</b> Authorised	<b>Supersedes:</b>	<b>Policy Owner:</b> Principal	<b>Review:</b> 1 Year
<b>Authorised by:</b> Principal	<b>Date Authorised:</b> 27.04.21	<b>Next Review Date:</b> Apr 2022	
<b>References:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adapted with permission from the SVSS Complaints Resolution System 260919</li> <li>• Feedback@Birali System/Form</li> </ul>		
<b>Definitions:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complaint: In the context of this resolution system, the term complaint encompasses concerns, grievances, complaints and all cases relating to harm to a child concerns.</li> <li>• Harm to a child: defined in the Child Protection Act 1999 (s9):               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Harm, to a child, is any detrimental effect of a significant nature on the child’s physical, psychological or emotional wellbeing.</li> <li>(2) It is immaterial how the harm is caused.</li> <li>(3) Harm can be caused by—                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) physical, psychological or emotional abuse or neglect; or</li> <li>b) sexual abuse or exploitation.</li> </ul> </li> <li>(4) Harm can be caused by—                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) a single act, omission or circumstance; or</li> <li>b) a series or combination of acts, omissions or circumstances.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>• Support Person: A support person is someone that you can nominate to attend a meeting with to provide you emotional support and reassurance. They are not an advocate.</li> <li>• Vexatious complainant: someone who persistently lodges complaints but doesn’t have sufficient grounds for doing so</li> </ul>		

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# Complaints Resolution System (Feedback)

## Overview

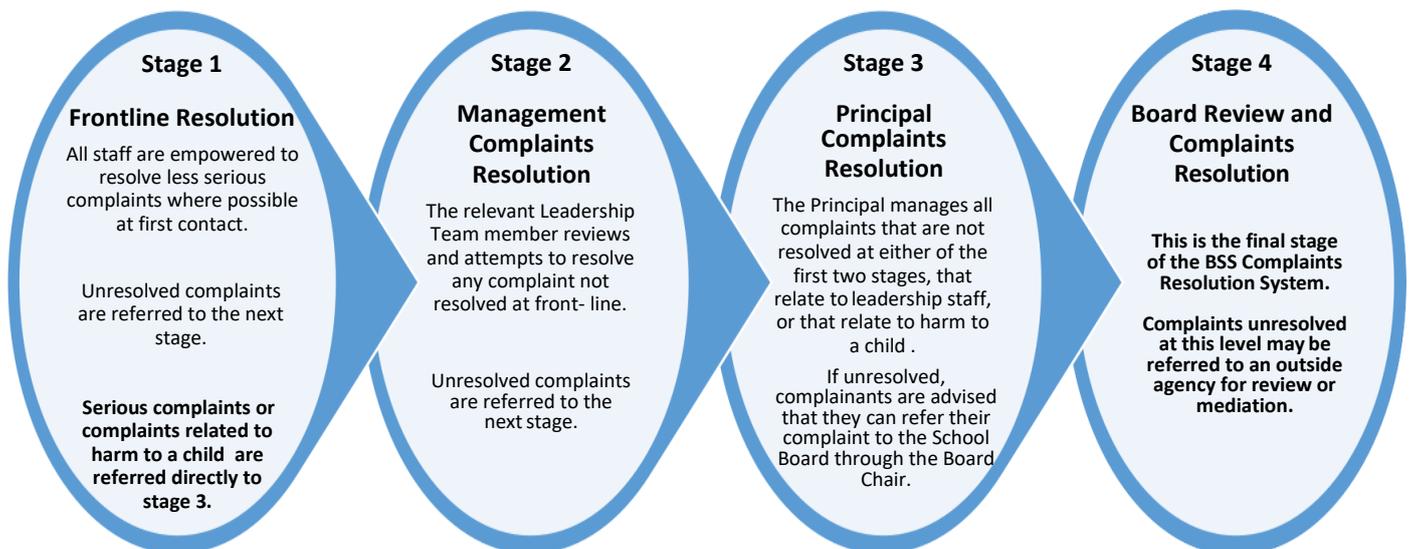
The BSS Complaints Resolution System (CRS) has four stages and comprehensive procedures for management of complaints at each tier of the system. This system is relevant to complaints received from parents, students, staff and community members.

BSS's CRS is a step by step way to make, receive, record, assess, review, respond and report on complaints. It recognises that complaints are usually, in the first instance, made verbally to staff and are often and desirably resolvable at first contact. At all times, complaints resolution should focus on maintenance of relationship and be addressed with the least amount of formality that is appropriate.

***This excludes any complaint that is related to harm to a child - these complaints must be referred immediately to the School Principal. The School Principal will act on reported harm to a child as required under Queensland Legislation and Law. The process is outlined in the Birali Child Protection Policy & Child Risk Management Strategy which can be found on our website here: <https://biralisteiner.qld.edu.au/policies-documents-reports/>***

Decisions made at any stage of the CRS process may be overturned by a more senior staff member if the complaint is escalated. Questions about the CRS should be directed to the School Principal.

## The System At A Glance



All complaints are to be registered within the Feedback@Birali System and delegated to the appropriate staff member for resolution.

**Stage 1:** Wherever possible complaints are initially managed and resolved by the person either receiving the complaint or to whom the complaint is directed.

**Stage 2:** Unresolved complaints are referred to the relevant staff member's immediate up-line manager i.e. complaints related to teaching staff or educational operations should be referred to the relevant Leadership Team Member; complaints related to administration should be referred to the Business Manager.

To avoid complainant fatigue, if the up-line manager believes that they will not be able to resolve the complaint at their level they will immediately refer the complaint to the Principal.

**Stage 3:** Unresolved complaints, complaints relating to senior staff and **complaints related to harm to a child** are referred to the Principal.

**Stage 4:** Complaints remaining unresolved in any of the first three stages, may be referred to the School Board of Directors.

# Complaints Resolution System (Feedback)

## Making A Complaint

A school is a complex organism that is based on human relationships. As such there is much potential for difficulties to arise in relationships, for disagreements to occur and for individuals to have disparate goals and views.

At BSS all members of our community are valued and respected and we acknowledge the right of all to make complaint or attempt to address their issues and/or concerns.

BSS is committed to ensuring that all complaints are dealt with in a fair, equitable and efficient manner. We have processes and support networks in place to enable you to work through any issues or concerns you may have.

Complaints can be made:

- By telephone or in person (preferred)
- In writing
- Anonymously (although anonymous complaints are difficult to resolve and are therefore discouraged, anonymous complaints will be assessed upon their merit if enough verifiable information is provided). All anonymous complaints will be referred directly to the Principal.
- If a complaint is made on a person's behalf, the BSS representative receiving the complaint will check that the person is happy for BSS to respond directly to their representative.

To achieve an effective resolution for all parties, when making a complaint, you should ensure you:

- provide complete and factual information in a timely manner
- deliver your complaint in a calm, appropriate and reasoned manner
- avoid making frivolous or vexatious complaints
- avoid using deliberately false or misleading information.

You should be aware that if you are making a complaint about a staff member, in most instances, the staff member will be told of the complaint and offered the right of reply. You also have the right to have a support person participate throughout the process.

The following four-step complaints procedure is in place to assist parents/carers, students and school staff to reach a positive outcome when issues arise.

### **1. Discuss your complaint with the teacher or staff member involved.**

- Make an appointment with the person involved as soon as possible; avoid making complaints in the moment or when emotionally charged and, where possible, give the person warning that you wish to bring a concern/complaint prior to the discussion.
- Discuss your complaint calmly with the person and give them opportunity to suggest a solution. In most cases, direct discussion should result in your concern being resolved.
- If you do not feel that your complaint has been satisfactorily addressed, advise the person that you intend to take the matter to the next stage of the resolution process. Alternatively, you and the person involved may agree to seek support to undertake an informal conflict resolution in an attempt to resolve the problem together; this can be organised by contacting the person's immediate manager.

### **2. Discuss your complaint with the involved party's immediate manager** – see table on the following page.

- Make an appointment to see the appropriate senior staff member to discuss the issue further.
- If you do not feel that your complaint has been satisfactorily addressed, advise the person that you intend to take the matter to the next stage of the resolution process.

# Complaints Resolution System (Feedback)

## 3. Discuss your complaint with the School Principal

- Contact administration and advise that you wish to meet with the Principal to discuss a complaint/concern.
- Administration will direct you to the Feedback@Biralisteiner online form (or you can access this directly via the school website and School Stream Forms) which you will need to complete prior to a meeting being organised.
- If you have discussed your complaint with the Principal and still feel that you have not reached a resolution, you have the right to contact and refer your complaint to the School Board of Directors through the Board Chair.

## 4. Lodge a Formal Complaint with School Board of Directors

- Complaints referred to the Board must be in writing and made using the Feedback@Biralisteiner online form and will be referred to the Board Chair.

**IMPORTANT NOTE: If you believe your complaint to be of a serious nature or if it is related to a Harm to a child matter, please refer it directly to the School Principal in writing.**

**If you choose to escalate your complaint beyond Stage 1 of the Complaint Resolution System, you should contact the relevant staff member below:**

<b>Stage Two: Complaints not able to be resolved directly with the person involved</b>		
<b>Complaints regarding:</b>	<b>Relevant Manager/Leadership Team member</b>	<b>Contact</b>
Student (excluding harm to a child matters) Education and Teachers/Aides	Educational Leader: Coordinator – Chloe Ann Francis Principal – (Interim) Helen Starr	<a href="mailto:cafrancis@biralisteiner.qld.edu.au">cafrancis@biralisteiner.qld.edu.au</a> <a href="mailto:principal@biralisteiner.qld.edu.au">principal@biralisteiner.qld.edu.au</a> Or phone the office on 07 5429 0511
Administration and fees/finances Admin Staff Buildings and Grounds	Business Manager – Beck Walker	<a href="mailto:businessmanager@biralisteiner.qld.edu.au">businessmanager@biralisteiner.qld.edu.au</a> Or phone the office on 07 5429 0511
<b>Harm to a child</b> Communications and/or Policy Senior Staff Anonymous Complaints	Principal – (Interim) Helen Starr	<a href="mailto:principal@biralisteiner.qld.edu.au">principal@biralisteiner.qld.edu.au</a> Or phone the office on 07 5429 0511
<b>Stage Three: Complaints not able to be resolved with the relevant Senior Staff member</b>		
All complaints	Principal – (Interim) Helen Starr	<a href="mailto:principal@biralisteiner.qld.edu.au">principal@biralisteiner.qld.edu.au</a> Or phone the office on 07 5429 0511
<b>Stage Four: Complaints not able to be resolved by the School Director</b>		
All Complaints	School Board via Board Chair	<a href="mailto:chair@biralisteiner.qld.edu.au">chair@biralisteiner.qld.edu.au</a>

**IMPORTANT NOTE: If you believe your complaint to be of a serious nature or if it is related to a Harm to a child matter, please refer it directly to the School Principal in writing.**

### What to expect once you have made a complaint:

It is our intention to manage all complaints in a timely, equitable and fair manner. Complaints that are complex or involve multiple views on events and circumstances may require an investigative period which may extend the normal reasonable complaints resolution period. If your complaint is likely to take longer than the time frames related below you will be advised and updated regularly regarding progress of your complaint.

## Complaints Resolution System (Feedback)

**Table A: Timeframes for Managing Complaints:**

Complaint Stage	Timeframe for response/action
<b>Stages One and Two</b>	
<p>After advising the relevant staff member that you wish to raise a complaint by completing the Feedback@Birali online form</p>	<p>All complaints must be lodged through the Feedback@Birali online form. If a staff member receives a complaint in writing or verbally, they must lodge the complaint, including the complainants contact details if available. All Feedback@Birali online form submissions will be acknowledged upon lodgement, via email, providing a reference number.</p> <p>If you state that you wish to meet regarding a complaint, or the relevant staff member wishes to meet, a meeting will be organised within 3 working days of the staff member receiving notification of a complaint.</p> <p>If a meeting cannot be organised within that time frame because of the circumstances of either party, an initial phone conversation will be offered within the 3 day period and a suitable meeting time agreed upon if required; this will be no longer than 5 working days from when the complaint is raised.</p> <p>If the complaint requires investigation, deliberation or action by the BSS staff member, progress reports or final advice will be offered at appropriate intervals to be agreed upon and documented by the concerned parties.</p> <p>Complaints not resolved within the agreed upon timeframe can be referred to the next stage by either party.</p>
<b>Stage Three: Principal Complaints Resolution</b>	
<p>After submitting your complaint via the Feedback@Birali online form; or requesting escalation to the Principal</p>	<p>All Feedback@Birali online forms will be acknowledged by email upon lodgement, providing a reference number. If referring from a stage one or two complaint, please include your original complaint reference number in your communication.</p> <p>A phone call and/or meeting will be organised within 10 working days depending on the seriousness of the complaint.</p> <p>If the complaint requires investigation, deliberation or action by the Principal, progress reports or final advice will be offered at appropriate intervals to be agreed upon by the concerned parties.</p> <p>Upon resolution or final advice regarding the complaint at Stage 3, you will receive a written report which covers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The issue raised</li> <li>• How the issues were considered</li> <li>• The people who were consulted</li> <li>• The action that has been or is to be taken</li> </ul> <p>The above time-frames and procedures may not apply if the complaint is deemed by the Principal to be vexatious.</p> <p>If this is the case, the complainant will be advised in writing that the complaint has been deemed vexatious and will not be pursued; the reasons for this determination will be provided.</p> <p>Complaints not resolved within the agreed upon timeframe can be referred to Stage 4 by either party.</p> <p>The Board will be advised by the Principal of any complaints that remain unresolved after 28 days from the commencement of Stage Three of the CRS.</p>

## Complaints Resolution System (Feedback)

Complaint Stage	Timeframe for response/action
<b>Stage Four: Board Review and Complaints Resolution</b>	
After submitting an escalation request to the Board via the Board Chair	<p>All Feedback@Birali online form escalation requests will be acknowledged in writing upon receipt or within 5 working days. Please ensure you include your original complaint reference number in your communication.</p> <p>The Board meets on a monthly basis and will consider the complaint at the next scheduled meeting.</p> <p>The complainant will be advised in the acknowledgement of receipt, the date of the next Board meeting.</p> <p>A progress report or final advice will be received within 5 working days of the Board meeting at which the matter is discussed. If the matter is not resolved at this point or final advice has not been determined, the complainant will be advised of the timeframe within which they can expect to receive final advice or further progress reports.</p> <p>Final advice will be received in writing and will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The issue raised</li> <li>• How the issues were considered</li> <li>• The people who were consulted</li> <li>• The action that has been or is to be taken</li> </ul>

### Receiving and Managing A Complaint

Birali Steiner School acknowledges that complaints:

- are inevitable and must be managed effectively
- are about responsibility
- can lead to growth and improvement

Birali Steiner School:

- acknowledges the right of individual stakeholders, parents, students, staff and community members, to make complaint when dissatisfied with a service or event
- supports staff to be 'feedback friendly' and not defensive or negative about feedback and complaints
- recognises that properly handled and analysed, complaints and feedback help the school to improve processes and can lead to individual and institutional growth and development

There are 5 Phases to receiving and managing a complaint within the BSS CRS. These 5 phases are relevant regardless of which stage the complaint has reached or is being managed at.

Phase 1.	Receiving and clarifying the complaint
Phase 2.	Deciding how to handle the complaint
Phase 3.	Investigating the complaint
Phase 4.	Making a decision about the complaint
Phase 5.	Review and reflection

These Phases as outlined below are descriptive of the steps a staff member should consider in the process of receiving and managing complaints. They should be read and implemented in conjunction with and in adherence to the requirements set out in Table A: Time-frames for Managing Complaints.

# Complaints Resolution System (Feedback)

## Phase 1 - Receiving and clarifying the complaint

### Any staff member receiving a complaint should always:

- be respectful and helpful
- give the person their undivided attention
- avoid becoming defensive, or apportioning blame
- remain positive
- be respectful and helpful
- acknowledge the issue and request the conversation be postponed if feeling uncomfortable or threatened

### When a staff member receives a verbal complaint they:

- listen carefully to the issues being raised
- summarise the issues to clarify and check that they understand what the complainant is saying
- empathise and acknowledge the complainant's feelings
- find out what the complainant wants to happen as a result of the complaint
- tell the complainant that they may use the support of a third party in progressing the complaint, if they feel this is needed
- resolve the complaint if possible, or assure the complainant that an appropriate staff member will address their complaint
- advise the complainant what will happen with their complaint in working to resolve the issue
- thank them for coming to resolve the issue

Many complaints are resolved at the first point of contact with information and/or an explanation, sometimes together with an apology and recognition of the effect the situation has had on the person. Some complainants may also want an undertaking that action will be taken to prevent the problem recurring.

A member of staff who receives a verbal complaint that is not resolved immediately, informs the complainant of the further option of:

- putting their complaint in writing via the Feedback@Birali online form
  - if the complainant requires assistance to complete the Feedback@Birali online form, the staff member will assist, or if unable to assist due to time constraints, will find an alternative staff member to assist the complainant.

In general, if the complainant agrees to put the complaint in writing, the member of staff takes no further action unless or until a written complaint is received.

If the complainant indicates that they would like help to record and register a formal complaint, the member of staff makes a written outline of the issues concerned. The record is read to the complainant, with opportunity for appropriate amendments and the complainant is asked to sign, where possible, the written version of the complaint. The staff member also signs and dates the complaint.

No signature is required for verbal complaints taken over the phone, but the complainant is asked to provide verbal confirmation of the issues that have been recorded.

**If a complainant refuses to sign or confirm a written recording of a verbal complaint, the staff member notes the refusal on the written complaint. The complainant is told that this refusal will be noted and that the process will be reliant on the staff member's interpretation and notes only. The complainant may not, at a later date, make another complaint based on a lack of satisfaction with this record of complaint.**

**If the complaint relates to a report about harm (whether physical/emotional/sexual) of a student, the complainant should be referred directly to the Principal. If the complainant is not willing to take the complaint formally to the Principal, the member of staff receiving the complaint must record as much detail as possible and refer this immediately to the Principal.**

# **Complaints Resolution System (Feedback)**

## **Receiving a written complaint:**

When a staff member receives a written complaint they should either respond asking the complainant to lodge the complaint through the Feedback@Birali online form, or the staff member should lodge the complaint through the form themselves, copying the content of the written complaint and inputting the complainants contact details. The complainant will then receive an automated email stating the complaint has been received. The staff member delegated to process the complaint should then contact the complainant to arrange a meeting, if applicable, within 3 days of receiving the complaint (refer to Table A: Time-frames for Managing Complaints.)

Depending on the nature of the complaint, the staff member may choose to request support for the meeting or refer it directly to their immediate up-line manager.

All complaints must be submitted through the Feedback@Birali system to ensure a copy of the complaint is in writing with a date and saved within the system.

## **Receiving an anonymous complaint:**

When an anonymous complaint is received, the complainant is told of the possible limitations associated with making an anonymous complaint.

All anonymous complaints are referred directly to the Principal.

## **Receiving a complaint about another member of staff:**

The BSS CRS recognises that complaints are generally best resolved when directed to the person concerned. A staff member receiving a complaint about another member of staff should:

- direct the complainant to the person concerned
- if the complainant is not comfortable speaking with the person concerned, direct the complaint to the immediate up-line manager of the person concerned

## **Phase 2 - Deciding how to handle the complaint**

### **When a front-line staff member receives a complaint, they:**

- make an assessment in the first instance about whether the issue can be dealt with immediately as a concern or a complaint
- make an assessment as to whether they believe they can resolve the complaint or if it should be referred to the subsequent tier of the CRS
- record details of the complaint: all concerns and complaints must be recorded by the staff member receiving them, in writing through the Feedback@Birali system for future review and reference

### **When an up-line manager receives a complaint, they:**

- ask the complainant if they have spoken directly to the person concerned and/or what steps they have taken to try and resolve the complaint; if appropriate. If the person refuses to speak directly to the person involved, the complaint should still be received and considered upon its merit
- make an assessment as to whether they believe they can resolve the complaint or if it should be referred directly to the Principal
- record all phone/face-to-face/written communication about the complaint through the Feedback@Birali system
- consider what resolution strategies might be used to resolve or prevent further escalation of the complaint
- initiate an investigation of the complaint, within the school, if further information is required

# **Complaints Resolution System (Feedback)**

## **When the Principal receives a complaint, they:**

- review the actions taken at previous stages and decide whether or not further action is warranted and advises the complainant of that decision
- attempt to resolve the complaint through resolution strategies, such as mediation
- initiate an investigation of the complaint, within the school, if further information is required
- If the complaint is in relation to **harm to a child**, the Principal reports the complaint to the appropriate legal and regulatory departments as per the school's Child Risk Management policy
- ensures that a record of all the information relating to the complaint is recorded in the Feedback@Birali System

## **When the Board receives a complaint, they:**

- Review the actions taken at previous stages and decide whether or not further action is warranted
- Advise the complainant of that decision in writing
- Maintain appropriate records of the discussion and decision

## **Phase 3 - Investigating the complaint**

The staff member, up-line manager or Principal gathers all the necessary facts about the complaint while keeping in mind the principles of procedural fairness of all parties concerned.

### Complaints can be investigated by:

- collecting and analysing information relevant to the matter
- working collaboratively with all people involved
- finding the facts relating to the matter
- identifying any contributing factors to the matter
- documenting the investigation report or outcome.

## **Phase 4 - Making a decision about the complaint**

Based on the facts gathered in Phase 3 about the complaint, the staff member, up-line manager or Principal makes a decision on the complaint.

The person/s making the decision should notify the complainant of their decision in writing including the reasons for the decision.

## **Phase 5 - Review Phase**

If the complainant is not satisfied with this response, they are advised of their option to escalate their complaint under the CRS. Decisions made at any stage of the CRS process may be overturned by a more senior staff member if the complaint is escalated.

Ensure an appropriate record of the complaint has been made and recorded within the Feedback@Birali system; including all the required information as specified in the *Information to Include When Recording a Complaint* section of this document.

# **Complaints Resolution System (Feedback)**

## **Information to include when recording a complaint:**

When recording a complaint include the following details as a minimum: other relevant information may also be included:

- the name and contact details of the person making the complaint
- date the complaint was received
- timeframes of the entire process – response timeframes and dates
- how the complaint was received e.g. telephone, in person, via email
- what the complaint is about
- information collected (what, when and from whom) and considered during the investigative or decision making stages
- actions taken to fix the problem
- complaint decision and the reasons for the decision
- final response communicated to complainant and any communication received back from the complainant
- date complaint finalised.

Any written correspondence received relating to the complaint should be attached to the complaint file.

## **Managing Vexatious Complaints and Unreasonable Complaint Conduct**

While most complainants behave in a cooperative and respectful way and come with the intention to resolve issues, from time to time the school and staff are confronted with unreasonable complainant conduct (UCC).

UCC is any conduct by a current or former complainant which raises substantial health (emotional and physical), safety, resource or equity issues for the school, its staff and community.

BSS acknowledges that people have a right to complain about perceived failings or issues that affect them, however, staff and all members of the community also have a right to dignity, physical and emotional safety, and respect.

BSS recognises that the manner in which staff interact with complainants can contribute to UCC and have a significant effect on a complainants conduct and the quality of future interactions, and as such expects all staff to treat complainants fairly and respectfully, remain calm, act professionally and impartially and clearly communicate processes and outcomes in accordance with the Complaints Policy and associated procedures.

Staff are not expected to endure any conduct that can be deemed unreasonable as defined above in the course of managing a complaint and should refer all such issues to the School Principal.

## **When a vexatious complaint or UCC arises the Principal will:**

### **Assess whether the complainants conduct is reasonable in the circumstances:**

- impact of conduct on staff, students or others
- merit of the issues raised, and the outcomes sought
- complainant's circumstances - including history and previous interactions
- proportionality – is the reaction/conduct reasonable for the seriousness of the issue/event
- responsiveness/reaction to advice or decisions
- style/content of communication
- whether personal boundaries have been breached

### **Identify and categorise possible conduct issue:**

- Persistent/nuisance
- Abusive/angry
- Demanding
- Uncooperative / argumentative

## Complaints Resolution System (Feedback)

### Select management strategies by considering:

- history of complainant's interactions with staff/school
- history of success - what methods have already been used
- likely level of impact on staff, other clients and service delivery
- personal thresholds and skill level of complaint handlers
- school policy, procedures and protocol.

### Implement strategies:

- put strategies into practice
- record investigation, decisions and strategies
- communicate strategy to the complainant

### Monitor strategies:

- complainant/staff response
- level of success
- alter strategy as required

## Monitoring of the Complaints Resolution System

BSS has systems in place to regularly review and monitor the effectiveness of the CRS. Review systems are as follows:

Review purpose	Review mechanisms	Frequency	By Whom
Identify complaint trends and outcomes	Review a summary of the complaints in the Feedback@Birali system; showing complaints managed and outcomes	End of each term	Leadership Team
	Review all complaints escalated to stage 3 of the CRS and review for trends	End of each Semester or as necessary if multiple complaints are received	Principal
Monitor the time taken to resolve complaints	When complaints are received at stages 2, 3 and 4, timeframes will be noted and recorded in the complaint file.	During each complaints' management process	Senior Staff member managing complaint
	Timeframes for resolution will be included in the above mentioned Leadership Team review	End of each Semester	Leadership Team
Review of general effectiveness of the CRS	Survey of staff Survey of parents Review of trends and outcomes data	Annually	Principal