

Complaints Management Policy

This document outlines the procedures undertaken at Ripley Valley State School to manage complaints. Complaint management at this school is also underpinned by Section 46 of the Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 (QLD), Education Queensland Complaints Management- State Primary College and Making a Complaint located on Education Queensland website.

Complaints come to principals and other school staff in many forms and can be from parents/carers, community members, staff or students.

All complaints are handled in a positive and open way.

Documentation

Our school documents all significant complaints. Complaints are recorded and reported to the principal as soon as practicable after receiving the complaint. Complaints can be made directly to the principal.

The record of the complaint:

- uses objective language clearly stating the facts
- contains information in chronological order as practically possible
- uses quotation marks, where appropriate and necessary
- is neatly and legibly written in biro/pen or print in clear unambiguous language
- includes, where necessary, initialled and dated corrections
- includes signature, designation of the author, and time and date of the incident/complaint

If the complaint is not resolved at the first point of contact, the complaint is acknowledged within five working days by telephone, in person, by email or in writing.

Documents related to the complaint are kept and stored in accordance with the relevant departmental policies and procedures. Please refer to Information Management and Access to Records Held in Schools.

There are five phases in managing a complaint

Phase 1 – Receiving and Clarifying the Complaint

Any member of the staff can receive a complaint. All complaints are received in the following manner:

- being respectful and helpful
- giving the person your undivided attention
- not being defensive, apportioning blame
- remaining positive
- not perceiving anger as a personal attack

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 telling you
- 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
- thank them for their complaint

Complaints are sometimes made with the assistance of an advocate, interpreter or third party (as agreed between the complainant and the principal). In this case staff will receive and clarify a complaint from more than one person.

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

When the complaint is not resolved immediately, the complaint is referred to the principal as soon as is practicable.

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

- putting their complaint in writing, or
- assisting the member of the staff to record, in writing, the particulars of their complaint

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.

However, if the complaint relates to a report about harm (whether physical/emotional/sexual) of a student under 18 years attending a state educational institution, refer to Student Protection, for detailed obligations of all Education Queensland employees.

Once a complainant indicates that they would like to register a formal complaint verbally, 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 (indicating their personal delegation, for example, Year 6 Teacher, Ripley Valley State Primary College) 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 the 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 the lack of satisfaction with this record of complaint.

Receiving a written complaint – When a written complaint is received it is date stamped and forwarded to the principal.

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

Adults are reminded that at no time are students, other than their own, to be approached for the purpose of raising issues or concerns.

Phase 2 – Deciding how to handle the complaint

When a staff member receives a complaint, they:

- begin the process of making an assessment about the complaint from the moment when the complaint is received
- make an assessment in the first instance about whether the issue can be dealt with as a concern or a complaint
- if they are not the principal, refer the complainant or the complaint to the principal for addressing

The principal decides whether to:

- take no further action
- attempt to resolve the complaint through resolution strategies such as mediation
- refer the complaint to the relevant internal or external agency, if required
- initiate an investigation of the complaint, within the school, if further information is required

Co-ordination of complaints – The principal has the final responsibility for the management of all complaints that relate to school management issues under his/her jurisdiction. The complaint can be referred to another staff member in the school for action (for example, the deputy principal, business manager or nominated staff member). If the complaint relates to departmental policy, or a departmental policy position, the complainant is advised to take their complaint to the relevant regional office. If the complaint is relation to official misconduct, student protection or a perceived breach of privacy, the complaint is directed to the Ethical Standards Unit and the Legal Administrative Law Branch.

Record of complaint – The principal ensures that records of a complaint and any referral of a complaint are kept for either internal or external review.

Phase 3 – Finding out about the complaint

The principal or delegate gathers all the necessary facts about the complaint while keeping in mind the principals of natural justice of all parties concerned.

The principal or delegate investigates the complaint 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
- consulting the relevant DET Procedure Register on issues that relate to the complaint
- 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 principal delegate makes a decision on the complaint. With 28 days of the receipt of the complaint, the principal provides the complainant with either:

- a written response, including reasons for the decision
- a written notification that their complaint has been referred to an internal or external agency.

Phase 5 – Review Phase

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response, they are encouraged to discuss it further with the school principal and/or advised to contact the principal's supervisor, the Assistant Regional Director – Schools at the regional office. Further review of the decision is available from the Queensland Ombudsman as described in **Making a Complaint**.