



School Community and Consumer Complaints Handling Procedures

Rationale

At school we make many decisions every day and try hard to do our best for all students. We like to know when things are going well and we also want parents and carers to tell us about their worries, concerns or complaints as soon as possible.

The NSW Department of Education (DoE) seeks to resolve difficulties, grievances and complaints in a prompt, impartial and just manner. The majority of complaints are resolved informally. However, some types of complaints need to be treated in special ways because of particular legislation, policies and procedures and may require the use of separate procedures or be referred to another unit within or outside the department.

Purpose

The aim of these procedures is to communicate to the school community how the school manages complaints. It should be read in conjunction with the DEC policy *Complaints Handling Policy (January, 2017)* and *School Community and Consumer Complaint Procedure (January, 2017)*.

The principles of this procedure include that:

- You have a right to let us know about the problem you are experiencing
- Our support and respect for you or your child will not lessen in any way if you use these procedures to report a concern
- Concerns about individuals (including students, staff members and other members of the school community) should be discussed with the school in a private forum
- Individuals who are the subject of a complaint are entitled to have their rights to privacy and confidentiality respected, and he/she have the right to respond to complaints
- Complainants are courteous to, show respect for and cooperate with school staff

Implementation

At Windang Public School you can expect we will:

- Deal with your concern or complaint honestly and politely
- Look into the matter raised thoroughly, fairly and as quickly as possible
- Keep you up-to-date with what we are doing
- Explain our decisions
- Apologise if we have made a mistake
- Tell you what we are doing to put things right
- Focus on solving the problem

Definitions

Complaint: An expression of dissatisfaction with the service provided, a decision made or the performance of staff

Complainant: A student, parent or community member making a complaint

Who can make a complaint?

Anyone can make a complaint including students, parents, carers and community members. We can assist you to make a complaint.

What can a complaint be about?

The complaint can be about any aspect of the service provided, or not provided, at Windang Public School including:

- The conduct or decisions of our staff.
- Our work methods, practices, policies or procedures.

How are complaints managed?

The five key stages of managing a complaint are:

1. Acknowledge complaint
2. Assess/gather information/resolve
3. Provide reasons for decision
4. Implement outcome actions
5. Close complaint and keep records

Receiving and clarifying a complaint

Anyone at the school can receive your complaint in writing, by email, by phone, by fax or in person. A staff member who receives a complaint will determine and advise you whether the complaint can be resolved informally or whether it should be referred to a supervisor and why.

Often the first point of contact for complaints in person or by phone is our school office staff. They will take a complaint and refer it to the person delegated to deal with the nature of the complaint. This may be the class teacher, Assistant Principal or principal. They will ask for some brief details from you about the nature of the complaint to assist in the assessment process.

In most cases, concerns about student behaviour, organisation and curriculum are referred to the class teacher or relevant Assistant Principal of that stage. Concerns about specific school activities are referred to the teacher delegated with responsibility. Concerns about a person, school policies or procedures are referred to the principal. The school will keep records of complaints received.

This procedure applies to all complaints other than complaints made by staff, which are dealt with under the *Staff Complaint Procedure*. Some complaints may fall outside the standard definition of a complaint, such as allegations of misconduct by a staff member and therefore need referral or a report to be made.

The beginning and end of a school day are busy times for teaching staff and it may not be possible to sort things out immediately due to other teaching responsibilities or staff absences. However, you can expect any matter that can be resolved informally to be actioned within five working days of

receipt. This procedure applies to all complaints other than complaints made by staff, which are dealt with under the *Staff Complaint Procedure*.

Anonymous Complaints

Complaints can be made anonymously and issues raised must be dealt with – to the extent possible. It is not appropriate to approach anyone and ask them if the complaint came from them.

Assess/Gather Information/Resolve

If your complaint cannot be resolved in an informal way or is assessed as more serious or subject to special procedures, we **may** ask you to put it in writing including:

- Your contact details
- Specific details of the problem
- The outcome you are seeking

Then, enough information will be gathered to allow a proper assessment of the concerns as quickly as possible. This information can include copies of previous correspondence, information and/or accounts from students, staff or other areas of the Department etc.

The principal will then assess how the complaint should be managed including:

- The formal procedure that is applicable
- Providing advice in writing on which procedure will be used and by whom
- Complaints should be finalised as soon as possible and no later than twenty working days. Outcomes will depend on the circumstances of each complaint and take into account any statutory requirements

Provide Reasons for Outcome

If other procedures do not apply, the principal or delegate will provide you with a written response to a formal complaint within twenty working days of receipt by the principal, including reasons for the decision. If you remain dissatisfied you may request a review of the decision. If a person is the subject of a complaint, he or she should also be provided with information about the outcome

Implement Outcome

Steps will be implemented to monitor the outcome of the complaint.

Record Keeping

A record of complaint, interviews and other documentation relating to a complaint investigated at the school will be kept at the school in a restricted access file. These records must be kept permanently.

Review Processes

Complainants may request a review of the complaint outcomes if they have information that:

- The complaint outcome was incorrect and/or;
- The complaint handling process was unfair

Requests for review should be in writing and give reasons for the request for the review and of which complaint. The review should be addressed to the original complaint manager or their supervisor and should be made ten working days from the initial complaint decision, unless there are circumstances that may have reasonably prevented the complainant from making the review request.

An independent or more senior person within the Department who has not previously managed the complaint will conduct the internal review. It should be completed within twenty days of the receipt of the request, wherever possible.

External review of complaints may be conducted by organisations such as the NSW Ombudsman.

8. Appendix One – Consumer complaint flowchart

