



MELBOURNE
RUDOLF STEINER
SCHOOL

COMPLAINTS AND GRIEVANCES POLICY

For students, staff, parents, members of the public and other organisations and authorities.

We regard relationships within our community as being of great importance and believe that they should be characterised by trust, respect, openness, fairness, integrity, equality and deep regard for children.

October 2022

Complaints and Grievances Policy

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Rationale

We regard relationships within our community as being of great importance and believe that they should be characterised by trust, respect, openness, fairness, integrity, equality and deep regard for children. Our School is open to concerns or complaints and is committed to improvement of procedures and communication where the change is needed. Avenues for raising concerns or complaints will be clearly outlined to all members of the School Community, through inclusion in the Parent Handbook which is available to all parents on the school website. Concerns or complaints will be received in a positive, respectful, professional manner and will be responded to in a timely and professional way. We request that concerns and complaints be delivered in the same manner. As an employer, the School has an obligation to provide staff with a safe working environment and to change to address any shortcomings revealed by complaints. Further, the School will review complaints and their resolution in an effort to address larger or more systemic issues and to improve the organisation.

Scope

This policy anticipates that the School may receive and need to respond to complaints arising from grievances from students or their parents/guardians, staff, members of the public or other organizations or authorities. It is anticipated that the complaints and/or grievances may pertain to educational, behavioural, professional, relational or School environment issues and may be informal or formal and be received verbally, digitally or in hard copy.

Privacy

The School respects the privacy of individuals and will protect personal information provided by a complainant in the complaints and grievances process. Paper documentation will be kept in locked storage and digital records will be password protected. While investigating a complaint or grievance, the School will only collect information that is required for investigation and will not share information without permission from the complainant. For further information, refer to the School's Privacy Policy.

What is a Complaint?

The School regards a complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction made to the School, in regards to a specific issue or concern related to the Schools activities, a person of responsibility within the school or the complaints-handling process itself, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected.

Grievances can be more general in nature and may relate to more than one incident. They usually involve the person with the grievance gradually increasing their feelings over time in relation to the behaviour or attitude of the school or an individual acting on behalf of the school.

A grievance is a real or imaginary wrong causing resentment and regarded as grounds for a complaint, or it can be a feeling of resentment or injustice at having been unfairly treated. Complaints or grievances may be expressed formally or informally and be verbal, written or emailed.

For information on how to bring a concern or complaint to the school please refer to our “Who can I speak to if I have a concern?” document that appears regularly in our Information Sheet and is available from the school office and on our Website.

Procedural Fairness and Aims

MRSS has the ultimate goal of resolving any complaints and grievances, being clear about the purpose and the desired outcomes of the measures put in place and prioritising student wellbeing and educational needs based on the principles of procedural fairness and engaging with the opportunity to improve our procedures and communication through complaints;

The principles of procedural fairness will be followed in all aspects of complaint handling, this includes:

- Clearly communicating where complaints and grievances can be raised
- Giving the complainant the opportunity to state their case
- Offering reasonable assistance to enable the complaint to be made
- Informing all the parties of the nature of the complaint investigation process including outcomes
- Handling the complaint process confidentially
- Addressing complaints as quickly as possible
- Assessing the facts and circumstances of the situation objectively and determining the complaint fairly
- Advising all parties of the outcome of the investigation
- Providing appropriate support to all parties, including the subject of the complaint
- Informing parties of the avenue of appeal if applicable.

Procedures for Dealing with a Complaint or Grievance

Upon receiving a complaint in whatever form, the complaint will be recorded and forwarded to the Administration Group of the College of Teachers and two members of that group (investigators) will be appointed to manage the complaint and working with the complainant. Appointment of the members will be based upon the area of the School that the complaint pertains to, existing relationships and relevant experience of the Admin members.

If the complaint or grievance is related to one of our other policies for example, Child Safety and Wellbeing, Workplace Occupational Health and Safety and Wellbeing, Behaviour Management or Whistleblowing the School will follow the procedures of that specific policy.

Otherwise the Administration Group will ensure:

- That the investigators are independent and have no personal interest or bias in the matter being investigated
- The investigators make reasonable and diligent enquiries to ensure that there is sufficient evidence before making findings
- The investigators are impartial and do not have a vested interest in the outcome of the investigation and that any potential conflicts of interest are disclosed to the Administration Group at the time of appointment through the Conflict of Interest Declaration Form.
- An investigation is carried out in a reasonable timeframe and that the complainant is informed of the planned timeframe
- Complaints and grievances are handled in a conciliatory, non-adversarial and non-legal manner
- Accurate records are made of the complaint or grievance and its resolution, in line with the school's privacy policy
- Complaints and grievances are resolved quickly and, where possible informally, only drawing on the formal procedures when it has not been possible to reach an informal resolution
- Respond to both the specific and (where applicable) the systemic issues raised by the complaint.

The following steps will be followed:

1. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE COMPLAINT OR GRIEVANCE

The two appointed members of the Administration Group will contact the complainant to acknowledge the complaint and identify themselves as having been appointed to the complaint. They will also provide the complainant with a timeframe for working through the complaint and an understanding of the process to be followed.

2. RECEIVING THE COMPLAINT OR GRIEVANCE

At the earliest opportunity the two Admin members will arrange to meet with the complainant, having offered the complainant the opportunity to arrange for a support person of their choosing to attend. The role of each person at the meeting will be established at the beginning and one of the Admin members will take detailed notes. Any meeting notes taken by the school remain the property of the School and are not to be provided to the complainant. A summary of the main points may be provided if applicable or requested in follow up correspondence. The complainant may take their own notes at the meetings. Recordings of the meetings are not permitted and an announcement regarding this should be made at the beginning of each meeting. The complainant will be listened to and if necessary supported, and their concerns will be acted upon at the earliest opportunity. During the meeting agreement will be sought on a timeline for investigating and resolving the complaint. During the meeting the Admin members will explain the process that will be followed to investigate and report/resolve the complaint. The complainant may choose to withdraw the complaint or grievance at any time.

3. INVESTIGATING OR ASSESSING THE COMPLAINT OR GRIEVANCE

The two appointed Admin members will report back to the Administration Group following the meeting and the resolution/process will be discussed and agreed upon. The members appointed to work with the complaint will then undertake and document an investigation which will reflect the ideals of procedural fairness described above, as well as the ideal of natural justice where the subject of a complaint (respondent) is given an opportunity to respond to the complaint. All parties to the investigation will be reminded of the importance of confidentiality. In the instance that the complainant is a victim of alleged wrongdoing or a victim is identified in the investigation, then the victim/s must be protected from further harm or trauma and must be provided with appropriate support as a priority. If a conflict of interest is identified in the investigation, then Independent Schools Victoria will be consulted and, subject to their advice, an independent investigator may be appointed. Should the complaint pertain to any illegal activity, then the School will contact the Police and cooperate fully in any investigation.

During the investigation the Administration Group Members appointed to the complaint should ensure that:

- The respondent is aware of all the allegations made against them in sufficient detail
- The respondent is allowed a reasonable opportunity and adequate time to respond to each of the allegations
- Participants are given the opportunity to have a support person in the interviews pertaining to the investigation
- Participants are reminded of the importance of confidentiality
- Participants are given the opportunity to respond to any contradictory evidence.

4. RESOLVING AND REGISTERING THE COMPLAINT OR GRIEVANCE

Following the investigation, the Admin members will report back to the Administration Group and following discussion a finding will be made. Based on this finding, the Group will decide upon any action that may be necessary and a timeline for this action. The complainant will then be informed about the finding, the action and the timeline. It is important that the complainant not be adversely affected in any way as a result of raising a concern or making a complaint. The complainant should be asked if they are satisfied with the process and the outcome and they should be offered the opportunity and method for appealing the process or resolution. All notes, documents and material relevant to the complaint will be kept together in an Admin file and stored securely in a locked cabinet in the school office.

5. IF THE MATTER IS NOT RESOLVED

If the complainant wishes to pursue an unresolved matter, the issue should be referred to the College of Teachers. The College of Teachers will ensure that the processes and procedures in place have been fair and that the College reserves the right to make a final decision as to how the complaint or grievance will be resolved. The complainant has the right to seek further resolution through relevant independent authorities or the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) and should be informed as such.

Complaints Register and Reflection

All complaints and grievances will be reviewed annually on the Administration Group Agenda to ensure procedures and patterns of resolution and outcomes are observed for future improvements. The Complaints and Grievances Policy will be reviewed bi annually.

Communication

COMMUNICATING WITH OUR FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY

MRSS ensures that the school communicates with students, families and community in a variety of ways which include formal and informal avenues of communication. Examples of this include;

Who can I talk to if I have a concern? Student Handbook/ Parent Handbook, Enrolment Contract, Weekly Information Sheet, School Website, Class Teacher meetings, Class Guardians meetings and distribution of other related policies, for example Child Wellbeing and Safety or Whistleblower Policies.

COMMUNICATING WITH STUDENTS

MRSS philosophy and values are based on openness, fairness and care for the other. When something goes wrong or is difficult for a student we not only have our formal process of communication but have a number of student-friendly informal avenues of communication with key staff members that students can approach informally. These include;

- Class teacher

- Class guardians – High School
- Support Education Staff
- Child Safety and Wellbeing Coordinator
- Office Staff – First Aid
- Other specialist teachers for example Outdoor Education teachers.

COMMUNICATING WITH STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

All new MRSS employees and volunteers within the interview process and induction process receive a job description of the position being applied for and a discussion about the other roles and responsibilities of staff—such as, teachers, guardians, Administration Group, College of Teachers. Within the induction process a staff handbook is given and discussions on OHS and avenues of communication are explained.

Reporting Obligations

If the School receives a complaint alleging any breach by the School of an obligation under the regulations, then the School must report the complaint to the VRQA and detail how the School responded to that complaint. The School also has reporting obligations regarding employees of the School to the Commission for Children and Young People which are detailed in the **Notifying Reportable Conduct Policy July 2017** and the **Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005**.