

PC-08: Complaint Handling Policy and Procedure

Purpose

Ipswich Girls' Grammar School including Ipswich Junior Grammar School (The School) recognises that from time-to-time people may experience difficulties in the workplace that require resolution.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that students, parents, staff members or other stakeholder complaints are dealt with in a responsive, efficient, effective, transparent, and fair way.

The School will seek to resolve issues quickly and use principles of conflict resolution to ensure that complaints are resolved efficiently.

The process for managing a complaint may be informal or formal depending on the nature of the complaint. The School treats both types seriously and will ensure that all parties are treated fairly and equally throughout the process.

Scope

This policy is applicable to students, parents, and staff members, including full-time, part-time, permanent, fixed term and casual staff members, as well as contractors, volunteers and people undertaking work experience or vocational placements, in any work-related context, including:

- the workplace, both during and outside normal working hours.
- work activities (for example, when dealing with other team members or stakeholders); and
- at work-related functions (for example, at School events).

Definitions

Complaint: is an “expression of dissatisfaction made to an organisation, related to its products, or the complaints handling process itself, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected” (as defined by the Australian Complaint Handling Standard ISO AS 10002-2006).

Dispute: would usually be viewed as an argument or disagreement and may be the result of an unresolved complaint.

Procedural fairness: is concerned with the procedures used by a decision-maker, rather than the actual outcome reached. It requires a fair and proper procedure be used when deciding.

Natural justice: is technical terminology for the rule against bias and the right to a fair hearing and is associated with procedures used by courts of law. The terms procedural fairness and natural justice are commonly used interchangeably.

Policy

The School is committed to ensuring that complaints are dealt with in a responsive, efficient, effective, transparent, and fair way and views complaints as part of an important feedback and accountability process. The School acknowledges the right of students, parents, staff members, and other stakeholders to raise concerns and the School encourages such feedback.

Types of concerns that may be resolved under this Policy.

Ipswich Girls' Grammar School including Ipswich Junior Grammar School encourages students, parents, and staff to promptly lodge concerns regarding sexual harassment, child protection, discrimination, workplace bullying, privacy breaches as well as more general complaints that include areas such as:

- Any type of problem, concern, or complaint a staff member may have about work or the work environment that is impacting on their ability to do their work and that they believe to be unfair or unjustified.
- Instances where the School, its staff members or students' actions or inactions may bring the School's

reputation into disrepute.

- Student or staff member behaviours that are contrary to the relevant Codes of Conduct.
- Issues relating to learning programs, assessment, and reporting of student learning.
- Communication issues with students or parents or between staff members.
- Concerns relating to school fees and payments and the actions around these processes.

Student complaints may be brought by students or by parents on behalf of their children, as appropriate in the circumstances.

Issues Outside of this Policy

The following matters are outside of the scope of this policy and will be managed as follows:

- Child protection concerns or risks of harm to children will be dealt with in accordance with the law and the school's Child Protection Policy.
- Student bullying complaints will be dealt with under the Student Bullying and Harassment Policy.
- Staff member complaints of discrimination, sexual harassment or workplace bullying will be dealt with under the Discrimination/EEO, Sexual Harassment and Workplace Bullying Prevention Policies.
- Student disciplinary matters, including situations involving suspension or expulsion, will be dealt with under the Code of Conduct for Students.
- Staff member complaints related to their contract of employment will be directed to the Director of People & Culture.
- Student or staff member violence or criminal matters will be directed to the Principal who will involve the police as appropriate.
- Formal legal proceedings.

Complaint Handling Principles

The School is committed to managing complaints according to the following principles:

- All complaints will be taken seriously and will be dealt with fairly, objectively and in a timely manner with as little disruption as possible.
- Anonymous complaints will be treated on their merits like any other complaint where possible.
- Mediation, negotiation, and informal resolution are optional alternatives in complaint management.
- Procedural fairness will be ensured whenever practicable, including the right of interested parties to the complaint to be heard.
- All parties to the complaint will be appropriately supported, confidentiality and privacy will be maintained, and all parties will be entitled to reasonable progress updates as far as practicable.
- Appropriate remedies will be offered and implemented in a timely manner.
- Complainants, respondents, and people associated with the processes will not be victimised because of their actions to lodge a complaint.
- The School will keep confidential records of complaints in personnel files.
- The School's insurer will be informed if a complaint could be connected to an insured risk.

Note on Confidentiality

Confidentiality is an important issue for all parties. It is essential that any complaint is treated in a confidential manner and with respect.

The School's policy is that complaints made by parents should not adversely affect their children and, similarly, that complaints raised by students should not affect them or other students.

It may be possible to deal with an issue without naming individuals. However, even if no names are given, the source of the complaint may be clear and thus confidentiality cannot be assured. 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 have a right, under procedural fairness, to know about complaints that might be damaging to their reputation. Such complaints will be known only to themselves and to those who are consulted as part of the process.

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

Note on 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 or staff members.

If there is a concern, individuals including staff, parents and/or students are encouraged to give their names. If they persist in wishing to remain anonymous, it is at the Principal's discretion, or their delegates, as to what action, if any, should be taken, and this discretion will depend on the nature of the complaint.

Responsibilities

Ipswich Girls' Grammar School including Ipswich Junior Grammar School (the School)

The School has the following role and responsibilities:

- Develop, implement, promote, and act in accordance with the School's Complaint Handling Policy and Procedures.
- Appropriately communicate, and provide training where applicable, the School's Complaint Handling Policy and procedures to students, parents, staff members and other stakeholders.
- Ensure that the Complaints Handling procedures are readily accessible by staff, students, and parents.
- Upon receipt of a complaint, manage the complaint in accordance with this policy and ensure that appropriate support is provided to all parties.
- Take appropriate action to prevent the victimisation or action in reprisal against the complainant, respondent or any person associated with the complaint.
- Keep records of all interactions, investigations and discussions undertaken as part of the complaint and implement agreed remedies in a timely manner.
- Monitor and report to the governing body of complaints and immediately refer any claim for legal redress to the Board.

All Parties to a complaint

The complainant and respondent have the following role and responsibilities:

- Understand, apply, and comply with the School's Complaint Handling Policy and Procedures.
- Lodge complaints promptly as soon as practicable after the issue occurs.
- Expect that the complaint will be dealt with fairly and objectively; in a timely manner; with procedural fairness; that natural justice principles will be observed; that confidentiality and privacy will be maintained as much as possible.
- Provide comprehensive, fact-based information in a timely manner to the School representative.
- Recognise that all parties have rights and responsibilities; show respect and understanding of each other's point of view; ensure all actions are undertaken in a non-threatening manner; and maintain and respect the privacy and confidentiality of all parties.
- Acknowledge that a common goal is to achieve an outcome acceptable to all parties wherever possible.
- Ensure that no frivolous or vexatious complaints are lodged and individuals are not victimised or act in reprisal against any party to the complaint or any person associated with the complaint.

Procedures

All members of the School community are strongly encouraged to maintain respectful, and collaborative working relationships and quickly address any misunderstandings should they arise. In the instance where misunderstandings/grievances cannot be resolved directly, the following procedures should be used for resolving grievances:

Option 1: Attempt to resolve the grievance directly.

If a person feels comfortable and safe in doing so, they should attempt to address the issue directly with the person involved. It is important that the person addresses their concerns in a professional and non-confrontational manner and clearly explains what the behaviour or concern is and how it is affecting them and/or their work.

The person should always ensure they remove any emotion from the discussion and simply focus on the facts that require addressing. They should also be aware that the person they are having an issue with may have no prior knowledge of their concerns or how their behaviour is being perceived.

However, a person may feel aggrieved during their engagement with the School and believe that the situation is serious enough to warrant assistance to remedy the issue. The source of the complaint may be varied, ranging from conflict over professional or academic issues, concern over an employment condition or application of a school policy through to serious discrimination or harassment.

Option 2: Report the concern to their Manager or relevant School representative.

If a person does not feel comfortable talking directly to the person/people associated with the concern, or they have tried to address the issue directly with the other person and it was ineffective, they should report the matter to their manager or relevant School representative.

A complaint may be initially communicated in a phone call, written letter, email, or a meeting. Issues should be raised in the first instance as follows:

- **Staff:** with their immediate Manager, or if a grievance is with a Manager, the issue should be raised with the Director of People & Culture; Principal; Head of Junior School; Deputy Principal or Chief Financial Officer.
- **Students:** with the class teacher, Head of House, or Deputy Head of Junior School.
- **Students or parents:** with academic complaints first with the class teacher, then Head of Department, Deputy Principal or Deputy Head of Junior School.
- **Contractors:** with the person who has engaged them at the School.
- **Parents and volunteers:** with the relevant member of staff overseeing the area of concern or with the Deputy Principal or Head of Junior School.
- **External stakeholders:** with the Principal or their delegate.

A manager or School representative must use reasonable endeavours to conduct an initial meeting with the concerned person who has raised the grievance to:

- obtain information about their grievance and what they consider will resolve the issue.
- explain how the grievance procedure works, including protection from victimisation; and
- decide if they are the appropriate person to handle the grievance. If the manager decides they are not the appropriate person, they will refer the complaint to the Director of People & Culture.

To resolve the grievance, there could be up to three steps taken: the informal, formal, and appeal processes.

Informal Process

Many complaints can be resolved through the informal process. Upon receipt of a complaint (written or verbal) the manager or School representative **acknowledge receipt of the complaint** and assess the nature of the complaint (usually within **5 business days**).

If appropriate, the manager or School representative will facilitate a discussion between those involved in the grievance. This meeting should occur within **7 - 10 working days** of the dispute being raised. In circumstances where they consider this process to be inappropriate or where it is not achieving the desired outcome, the grievance may be escalated, or it may result in the grievance being taken through a formal process.

This approach is not an option for dealing with matters related to Child Protection or formal complaints of harassment, bullying or discrimination which should always progress immediately to the formal policy processes.

Where this informal process is not appropriate or does not lead to resolution, the formal complaint procedure will then apply.

Formal Process

The formal process involves an investigation of the grievance and a decision about appropriate actions and outcomes. A record of all conversations, interviews, and supporting documentation collected throughout the grievance process will be kept on file. This process may include some or all the following steps depending on the type and severity of the complaint:

Step 1: A formal written complaint is submitted to the manager, Director of People & Culture, Deputy Principal, Head of Junior School, the Chief Financial Officer, or the Principal. The complaint must include dates, the people involved, the facts of the event, how it has been dealt with to date, and the desired outcome for it to be resolved effectively.

Step 2: The manager, School representative (i.e., Deputy Principal) the Director of People & Culture (for issues involving staff grievances) will review the complaint and decide if an investigation needs to take place prior to a formal meeting.

Step 3: An investigation will be conducted in circumstances where more information is required, where there are conflicting accounts of events or to establish if the complaint has merit. The investigation may include individual interviews with those involved and/or the collection of supporting documentation or evidence. This is usually undertaken by the manager, School representative (e.g., Head of Junior School) and/or the Director of People & Culture or external party when required.

Step 4: Once an investigation has been conducted, a formal meeting will be held to allow the person(s) whom the complaint is about to offer their response on the concerns raised throughout the investigation or complaint documentation.

Step 5: Following the investigation, a resulting course of action may be provided for those involved based on all the information collected. Potential actions may include, but are not limited to:

- no action
- mediation; and/or
- training or mentoring
- letter of expectation
- performance management (incl. Performance Improvement Plan)
- a formal warning
- termination of the employment relationship.

Once the recommended actions have been put in place, the School will regularly follow up with those involved to ensure the complaint has been resolved.

Should an investigation into a complaint show that the complaint was unfair, untrue, vexatious, malicious, or discriminatory, this will be followed up with the complainant and dealt with under this policy. There may be resulting disciplinary actions taken that could include termination of employment.

During all stages of the grievance process, everyone involved will be treated fairly and will be provided with procedural fairness. The School will ensure that all are:

- informed of any allegations against them
- given an opportunity to respond.
- given adequate notice of meetings.
- allowed a support person.
- treated in a professional and non-judgmental way ensuring procedural fairness; and
- provided with confidentiality.

Formal complaints will be tracked and monitored by the Director of People & Culture. Details of the issue, dates and names of the parties involved, the investigation process, actions taken, location of file and the outcome will be recorded. A detailed file will be kept in confidential School records.

Professional Conduct

Work will continue as normal while a grievance is being dealt with unless the situation is deemed to be serious enough for this to be inappropriate. In these situations, a team member may be stood down with,

or without, pay during an investigation. This is to ensure anyone involved can work in an environment they feel safe and comfortable in.

All individuals affected by the grievance are expected to cooperate with the School to ensure the efficient and fair resolution of the grievance. During an investigation, the School expects all parties to be honest, professional, and show respect to those individuals involved. All individuals involved in the resolution of the complaint have an obligation to keep the grievance confidential.

Disciplinary action will be taken against any person who breaches confidentiality, fails to cooperate, or victimises/retaliates against a person who has lodged a grievance. Such action may include a formal warning, or in more serious cases, it may result in the termination of employment.

Escalation and Appeal process

Whilst all parties to a complaints process may not be happy with the outcome, the escalation of a grievance should only occur in the following circumstances:

- The issue has been raised with a staff member's immediate supervisor, but no action has been taken within a 7 to 10 working day period.
- If a person is not satisfied with the outcome of a formal investigation, they may appeal the decision internally or externally.
- If the complaint involves the Principal, this should be escalated to the Chairman of the Board of Trustees via a letter addressed to them via the Director of People & Culture of the School.
- A complaint may be escalated as follows:
 - Staff to the Deputy Principal, Head of Junior School or Director of People & Culture.
 - Students with the Head of Department, Head of House, or Deputy Head of Junior School or Dean of Students.
 - Parents and volunteers with the Deputy Principal or Head of Junior School; and
 - External stakeholders and contractors with the Chief Financial Officer or Principal.

Any appeal against the resolution of a complaint should be made in writing to the Principal and will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. An appeal will only be considered if there is evidence that there was a procedural problem with the investigation.

The Principal, at their discretion, will consider the application for a review and will either direct that the complaint be re-examined or direct that the matter be closed.

Access to support and representation

It is acknowledged that raising issues of conflict may be difficult for some people. Therefore, the option exists for a support person to be included in any meetings with the person investigating the complaint upon request.

The role of a support person is to provide physical and psychological support to a staff member and will assist the staff member throughout the meeting; they are not entitled to speak or advocate on their behalf during the meeting. The School requests that a staff member provide 24 hours' notice to the School of their intention to bring a support person to a formal meeting along with the name of that person for record purposes.

A support person could be a colleague, friend, family member or Union representative and in the case of students, parents, or guardians.

The School can only refuse a staff member's choice of support person if there is a potential conflict of interest (e.g., another staff member involved in the matter).

Breaches and Reporting

All staff members have a responsibility to adhere to this policy as part of their contract of employment. If you feel this policy has been breached, you should report your concern to your manager.

Please refer to the Grievance Policy and/or Performance Management Policy for the process and procedures that may be followed to manage breaches of this policy.

A breach of this Policy may result in disciplinary action being taken against them, up to and including the termination of employment.

Related Policies and Documents

- *Fair Work Act 2009*
- *Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (Qld)*
- *Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)*
- *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 (Qld)*
- *Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986 (Cth)*
- *Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)*
- *Age Discrimination Act 2004 (Cth)*
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)*
- *Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth)*
- *Enterprise Bargaining Agreement*
- *Code of Conduct - Staff*
- *Discrimination and EEC Policy*
- *Sexual Harassment and Workplace Bullying Prevention Policy*
- *Work Health and Safety Policy*
- *Privacy Policy*

Complaints Record Form

(To be completed by the person receiving the complaint)

Date of Complaint	
Complaint received by	
Complaint made via	<input type="checkbox"/> Telephone <input type="checkbox"/> Letter (attached) <input type="checkbox"/> In person <input type="checkbox"/> Other.....
Subject of Complaint	

Details of the complaint should be written on the next page. If there is insufficient space, attach extra sheets.

Information to be given to the Person making the Complaint:

- Reassure the complainant that all complaints are treated confidentially and that they will not experience any loss of support or service because they have made a complaint.
- Explain the complaints procedure.
- Thank the person for their complaint and explain that complaints are valuable in assisting to maintain and improve services provided by the School.

Name of Complainant	
Address	
Phone number	

Details of Complaint (attach details to form if more space is required)	
Comments	
Action to be taken	
Written feedback to be given by (date) (within 7 days)	
Outcome	
Signed	
Date	
Referred to (if outcome unsatisfactory)	
Date	
Follow up required and by whom	

