



HAWKESBURY
INDEPENDENT SCHOOL

Complaints Handling Policy and Procedures

October 2024

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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose and scope

This policy sets out the approach of Hawkesbury Independent School referred to as 'the school' in handling complaints made in respect of our services and/or operations or about the behaviour and/or decisions of a staff member (which, for the purposes of this policy, includes employees, contractors, volunteers and members of the School Management Committee) or about the behaviour of a student of the School. This policy does not extend to personal grievances between parents, guardians or other members of the school community.

1.2 Whistleblowing complaints

This policy does not extend to complaints which are whistleblowing disclosures. The procedure for processing whistleblowing complaints is dealt with in the school's *Whistleblowing Policy*.

In summary a whistleblowing disclosure is a disclosure which:

- is made by a committee member, staff member, a person who supplies goods or services to the school, including a volunteer, an employer of a supplier or a relative of any of these people;
- involves alleged misconduct, an improper state of affairs or circumstances, or illegal activity, and
- is made to a senior staff member, or officer of the school, the school's auditor or a person who the school has authorised to collect such disclosures.

1.3 Matters covered by other policies

Some types of complaints require specific treatment and are therefore dealt with under other school policies. This *Complaints Handling Policy* does not extend to complaints of the nature outlined below.

Complaints about reportable conduct will be addressed in accordance with the school's *Procedures for Handling Allegations of Staff Misconduct and Reportable Conduct* (which is available on the School's website) and the School's *Child Protection Policy*.

Complaints regarding a grievance between students will be addressed in accordance with the school's *Behaviour Management Policy* and/or *Anti-bullying Policy*.

Complaints regarding a grievance between staff members about work matters, including work relationships and decisions made by other staff members which impact on their work, will be addressed in accordance with the school's *Staff Grievance Policy*.

Complaints regarding unlawful discrimination, harassment or bullying between staff are generally addressed in accordance with the school's *Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying Statement*.

Complaints regarding teacher accreditation processes will be addressed in accordance with the school's *Teacher Accreditation Procedures*.

1.4 Confidentiality

All parties involved in complaints handling are required to maintain appropriate confidentiality, including in relation to handling and storing records.

2. What is a complaint?

A complaint or grievance is an expression of dissatisfaction made to the school about an educational and/or operational matter relating to services provided by the school or the behaviour or decisions of a staff member, contractor or volunteer, including misconduct.

If a parent/carer or student has a concern about the conduct of a staff member, they should raise their concern with the school in accordance with section 3 below.

If a complaint that concerns the behaviour of a staff member may constitute reportable conduct, the matter will be addressed by the school's *Child Protection Policy* in accordance with section 1.3 above. A complaint about a reportable conduct matter may be current or historical. Timeframes for investigation of complaints relating to reportable conduct are dependent on the individual matter and may be over an extended period of time, particularly in the case of a historical allegation. The school is bound by privacy or other confidentiality requirements when conducting investigations of reportable conduct allegations, which may limit the information that can be shared with the complainant regarding the outcome of an investigation. Please refer to the school's *Child Protection Policy* for information about reportable conduct.

Complainants are not required to assess whether their concern meets the threshold of reportable conduct before making a complaint. Any concern about a child's wellbeing or the conduct of an employee, volunteer, contractor or member of the school community may be reported under this policy.

Complaints may be made by a student or parent/carer or any member of the school community.

The school will seek to resolve complaints informally where possible but acknowledges that in some cases a person may wish to make a formal complaint.

3. Raising a complaint

3.1 The complainant

Complaints may be raised by a complainant directly with the person involved. However, if the complainant does not feel comfortable doing so or the matter is one where it may not be appropriate to do so a complaint can be made to the Principal. Any complaint about the conduct of a staff member should be raised directly with the Principal in the first instance.

Should the matter not be resolved between the parties directly in the first instance, the complainant may raise the matter with the school. A complaint can be made in writing to the Principal, via email principal@his.nsw.edu.au

Where a person wishes to make a complaint concerning the Principal, the complaint should be made in writing to the Convenor of the Management Committee, via letter addressed to:

The Convenor of the Management Committee

c/- Hawkesbury Independent School

PO Box 3115

Grose Vale NSW 2753

In this situation, the references in this policy relating to the role of the Principal should be read as references to the Convenor of the Management Committee.

3.2 The school

The Principal or delegate will generally acknowledge receipt of a complaint raised with the school in writing as soon as practicable.

4. Handling complaints

4.1 Assessing a complaint

The Principal generally will assess the complaint and determine:

- whether the complaint is one to be addressed under this policy or is a staff grievance or reportable conduct matter, or another matter identified in section 1.3 which are dealt with by the relevant policies, see section 1.3 above; and
- the priority of the complaint in accordance with the urgency and/or seriousness of the matter raised; and
- whether the school may be required to report the matter to the Office of the Children's Guardian, Police, Department of Communities and Justice or other relevant authorities should the complaint relate to possible unlawful conduct or other reportable matters.

4.2 Managing a complaint

The Principal generally will manage a complaint by:

- a) advising the complainant of the likely steps that will be undertaken by the school in relation to the complaint;
- b) if appropriate, advising the relevant parties of the complaint at the relevant time and providing them with an opportunity to respond;
- c) collecting any additional information the School considers necessary to assess the complaint;
- d) making a decision about how the complaint will be resolved ("resolution decision"); and
- e) if appropriate, advising the complainant in writing, and any other relevant parties as appropriate, of the resolution decision of the Principal and if appropriate, any proposed action to be taken.

There may be circumstances where some of the steps outlined above are not appropriate and the school will determine, on a case-by-case basis the most appropriate method of handling the complaint.

A complainant and the relevant parties that the complaint is about may choose to have an appropriate support person present at any meeting with representatives of the school about the complaint. However, the school maintains the right to determine whether the person's preferred support person is appropriate and may not approve the attendance of a support person where they are determined by the school to be inappropriate.

5. Contact

If you have any queries about this policy, you should contact the Principal for advice.