



NEWCASTLE WALDORF SCHOOL

COMPLAINTS HANDLING POLICY AND PROCEDURES

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Approved by:	Co-Principals
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Introduction

Newcastle Waldorf School understands that from time to time parents and students may raise complaints in respect of services provided by the School or against staff members, which includes employees, contractors and volunteers. The following policy and procedures outline the way in which complaints will be handled by the School.

The School values a culture where raising an issue is welcomed as a means of ensuring that issues are resolved when they arise, in the best interests of all parties concerned with no adverse consequences for the person raising an issue.

The School aims to make these procedures as accessible as possible, in particular by offering a number of avenues and persons through which a complaint can be addressed, and by assuring that potential conflicts of interest are acknowledged and treated with due consideration.

If parents raise concerns early, and they are addressed informally by class and subject teachers or a Co-Principal, the likelihood that they will turn into formal complaints may be greatly reduced.

Whistleblowing complaints

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

In summary a whistleblowing disclosure is a disclosure which:

- is made by a Board 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 whom the School has authorised to collect such disclosures.

Related policies

Complaints about reportable conduct will be addressed in accordance with the *NWS Child Protection 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, are addressed in accordance with the *NWS Staff Grievance Policy*.

Complaints regarding unlawful discrimination, harassment or bullying between staff are generally addressed in accordance with the *NWS Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying Statement for Employees, Contractors and Volunteers*.

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

Complaints regarding a grievance between students will be addressed in accordance with the *NWS Supporting Positive Behaviour Policy, Appendices 2-4*.

What constitutes 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. This policy deals with complaints made by parents, carers, students or any members of the School community.

If a parent/carer or student has a concern or complaint about the conduct of a staff member, they should raise their concern with a Co-principal in the first instance.

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 as noted above. A complaint about a reportable conduct matter may be current or historical. Timeframes and confidentiality requirements for investigating a complaint about a reportable conduct matter may vary considerably. 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.

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.

Procedures

Raising a Complaint

Concerns or complaints about the conduct of a staff member must be raised with a Co-Principal in the first instance.

Informal complaints may be raised by a complainant directly with the class teacher/guardian, subject teacher, or the person directly involved. 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 a Co-Principal. Complainants should expect that concerns raised informally will be taken seriously by teachers and referred to the College of Teachers or a Co-Principal if necessary.

It is important that both parties follow up concerns to ensure that everyone is satisfied with the resolution. If there is no satisfactory resolution, a Co-Principal should be included in the concern to assist in achieving a satisfactory resolution.

Should the matter not be resolved through informal processes, the complainant may raise the matter formally with the School.

Formal complaints may also be appropriate when the issue is already perceived to be beyond the level of a concern or informal complaint. This can be done by either arranging to speak with a Co-principal in person, or, if preferred, by email. A complainant may email a Co-principal directly or address the complaint to complaints@newcastlewaldorfschool.nsw.edu.au, in which case the complaint will be addressed by one of the Co-principals. The Co-Principal will then be in a position to ensure that the correct procedure is followed. If the complaint is about a Co-Principal, the complainant should address their complaint to another Co-Principal

who may then decide to involve the Chair of the Board, in which case the references to the role of the Co-principal should be read as references to the Chair of the Board.

Once received in writing, the Co-Principal or Chair will acknowledge receipt of the written complaint as soon as practicable and generally commence the Complaints Handling Procedure within five working days.

Complaints Handling Procedure

Assessing a complaint

The Co-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 which are dealt with by the relevant policies, 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.

Managing a complaint

A Co-Principal generally will manage a formal complaint by:

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

Steps that may be taken in relation to a complaint

- A Co-Principal will usually involve another Co-Principal or the Chair of the Board in managing a complaint.
- A Co-Principal may help set up an appointment with the person(s) involved in an attempt to resolve the complaint. Both parties may take notes at the meeting. If the concern or complaint is about the conduct of a staff member the Co-Principal will decide whether the meeting should involve the staff member or not.
- A Co-Principal may decide that meeting with relevant parties separately is more appropriate.
- A Co-Principal may discuss the matter with the College of Teachers, depending on the nature of the complaint, and with regard to privacy.
- A Co-Principal may seek external advice from the AIS or other relevant organisation.

Complaint Resolution

In most cases when a formal complaint has been resolved, the School will notify the complainant in writing of the resolution. The complainant may not be entitled to know all/any actions taken as a result of the complaint (for privacy reasons), but they will be given general assurance that appropriate action has been taken.

If a complainant is not satisfied with the resolution decision made by a Co-Principal and wishes to escalate their complaint to the Board of Directors (if the Board is not already involved), the Board must be provided with: outcomes from previous negotiations, discussions and meetings; all relevant information; complaint handling report, with tracking and timeframes; any relevant School policy; and anything else reasonable to help them make an informed decision. The Board of Directors will

seek advice from relevant external organisations such as the Association of Independent Schools in finalising the complaint.

Confidentiality

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

Contacts

All staff members at Newcastle Waldorf School can be contacted at 'firstname'@newcastlewaldorfschool.nsw.edu.au

If you are unsure where to direct your complaint, please call the School office on 0249544853 for contact details.