

Complaints, Grievance, Concerns Procedure Parents



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*A Ministry of the Nambucca River Pastoral Charge
of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in NSW*

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Complaints, Grievance, Concerns Procedure

Procedure Description

This procedure is to help parents/guardians understand the correct method to raise a concern with the School. The procedure will ensure parents/guardians that their concern is heard and resolved to the best of our ability by those involved, or those who have authority to become involved. It is important to discuss the matter first with the school, rather than shared throughout the School Community.

Principles

- All members of the school community are to be treated with respect.
- Staff acting in roles of responsibility are to be recognised as having authority.
- Any discussion of a concern must be polite and respectful. All of our actions in discussions must honour God.
- People are defamed when their reputation is injured. Parents and guardians must ensure that their communication complies with the law.
- Staff will keep a written record of all interviews conducted.

Common Procedures

How to raise a complaint/grievance

1. If the concern involves:
 - a. a classroom or subject teacher, it is essential to write a note to the teacher to have the teacher contact you. Discussions with teachers should be by appointment to discuss the concern.
 - b. support staff (eg finance, general office, property maintenance), please contact the person concerned and arrange an appointment.
 - c. sending an email to complaintsofficer@nvccs.nsw.edu.au
 - d. Writing a letter to Nambucca Valley Christian Community School addressed to "The Complaints Officer".
 - e. All formal complaints will be logged onto a complaints management register on the school's server and managed in accordance with the following procedure.

Our Internal Complaints Handling Process

Step 1 - All formal complaints are logged through our complaints management system where they are screened by our Complaints Officer, or in the case of complaints against the Principal by the Chairman of the School Board.

Step 2 – All valid complaints will be acknowledged in writing, as soon as practicable, and allocated a status, priority and target resolution date. It is our policy, where possible, to resolve all disputes within 20 days.

Step 3 – The Complaints Officer shall conduct an investigation into the issues raised, following principles of procedural fairness, and make a determination.

Step 4 - Following the determination, if appropriate, the Complaints Officer shall formulate a resolution and provide a written response to the complainant. The matter will be closed if this response is accepted.

Step 5 - If the initial response is not acceptable the matter will be reviewed internally by the Principal or the Principal's delegate, who may seek additional information or submissions from the relevant parties. The Principal or their delegate seek to resolve all disputes within 20 days from the date that the review process is initiated. The matter will be closed if the response of the Principal, or their delegate, is accepted.

Step 6 - All complaints received will be entered into our complaints management system by the Complaints Officer and, where appropriate, a corrective action request will be made to address any underlying processes which the complaints investigation revealed may require improvement.

How is this policy different and similar for Students and Parent(s)/Legal Guardians?

1) Students

- a) Students should contact the subject teacher or Head of School or Head of Welfare in the first instance to attempt mediation/informal resolution of the complaint.
- b) If the matter cannot be resolved through mediation, the matter will be referred to the Principal.
- c) At this point, the student should notify the school in writing of the nature and details of the complaint.
- d) Each complainant has the opportunity to present his/her case to the Principal. Students may be accompanied by a support person.
- e) The formal complaints process will commence within 10 working days of the lodgement of the complaint with the Principal.
- f) Once the Principal has come to a decision regarding the complaint, the student will be informed in writing of the outcome and the reasons for the outcome.
- g) If the complaints procedure finds in favour of the student, the School will immediately implement the decision and any corrective and preventative action required.
- h) If the complaints procedure does not find in favour of the student or the student is dissatisfied with the result of the complaints procedure, he/she will need to present their complaint in writing to the Chairman of the School Board. The School Board is the final arbiter in all decisions
- i) The School undertakes to finalise all complaints procedures within 20 working days.
- j) For the duration of the appeals process, the student is required to maintain enrolment and attendance at all classes as normal.

2) Parent(s) / Legal Guardians

- a) Parent(s)/legal guardians should contact the subject teacher in the first instance, then the Head of Welfare, Head of Primary and then if needed in the second instance, the Deputy Principal to attempt mediation/informal resolution of the complaint.
- b) If the matter cannot be resolved through mediation, it will be referred to the Principal.
- c) At this point, parent(s)/legal guardians must notify the school in writing of the nature and details of the complaint.
- d) Each complainant has the opportunity to present their case to the Principal. Parent(s)/legal guardians may be accompanied by a support person.
- e) The formal complaints process will commence within 10 working days of the lodgement of the complaint with the Principal or if the complaint is against the Principal, the process is undertaken by the School Board with all relevant correspondence being given to the Chairman of the Board.
- f) Once the Principal or School Board has come to a decision regarding the complaint, the parent(s)/legal guardian will be informed in writing of the outcome and the reasons for the outcome.

- g) If the complaints procedure finds in favour of the parent(s)/legal guardian, the School will immediately implement the decision and any necessary corrective and preventative action.
 - h) The School undertakes to finalise all complaints procedures within 20 working days.
2. The School, normally through the staff member who is the subject of the complaint, will respond to a phone call that day or within two days of a call being made. On most occasions, complaints/grievances can be resolved in a short time frame by a phone call or an arranged appointment. Explaining why homework or assignments weren't submitted and the extenuating circumstance can bring understanding to the teacher or a realisation to the parent that there had been a long time to organise completion of the work and better work practises need to be adopted in the future.

On occasions it will be important to clarify remarks made in conversations between the complainant and the person subject of a complaint. It is important that parents and caregivers feel there is an opportunity to raise concerns if they feel aggrieved. Sometimes, but not always, the School may choose to respond to these concerns in writing. In all circumstances the School will acknowledge by phone or in writing that they are addressing the complaints/grievances/concerns which have been raised.

The School seeks to follow up all matters up within a week or sooner than this depending on the nature of the issue. It undertakes to finalise all matters within 20 days. High risk and serious complaints may need to be addressed within hours or days.

Higher Level Complaints

3. If the complaint or grievance is at a higher level such as ill treatment, physical abuse, psychological abuse or sexual abuse it is appropriate to raise this with the Principal, who is the Head of Agency. The Principal will investigate these matters within the scope of his authority or refer them to the NSW Ombudsman's Office, Family and Community Services or NSW Police. The Principal is trained to use his judgement regarding whether the nature of an allegation requires such action. In some cases he must enact mandatory reporting depending on the relevant legislation and delegations from the NSW or Federal Government.

The School Board have delegated the management of school fees to the Business Manager and as appropriate the Principal. The School Board have also decided that and the Principal is the final arbiter in all matters relating to school fees unless it is considered necessary that legal proceedings are the final course of action to resolve a financial account. The Principal will represent such requests to the next School Board meeting for their decision.

The Principal is trained and accredited at least every three years, by an external legal firm, to competently respond to Child Protection Complaints and Investigate Reportable Conducts.

The School also has a Board Member with the same training, should the Principal or a member of his family be the subject of a serious allegation. A serious allegation is not an opinion that there has been a lack of leadership. A serious allegation is where ill treatment, physical abuse, supervisory neglect, psychological abuse, sexual misconduct or sexual abuse are alleged to have occurred.

The School Board chooses to ask all members of the school community to communicate to and through the Principal unless the complaint or grievance is about him (or his family) and defined as Reportable Conduct to the NSW Ombudsman, placing a child at Risk of Significant Harm or criminal in nature. Matters that are not in these categories will be referred back to the Principal by the Board.