

## Complaints Handling Procedures

Updated April 2023

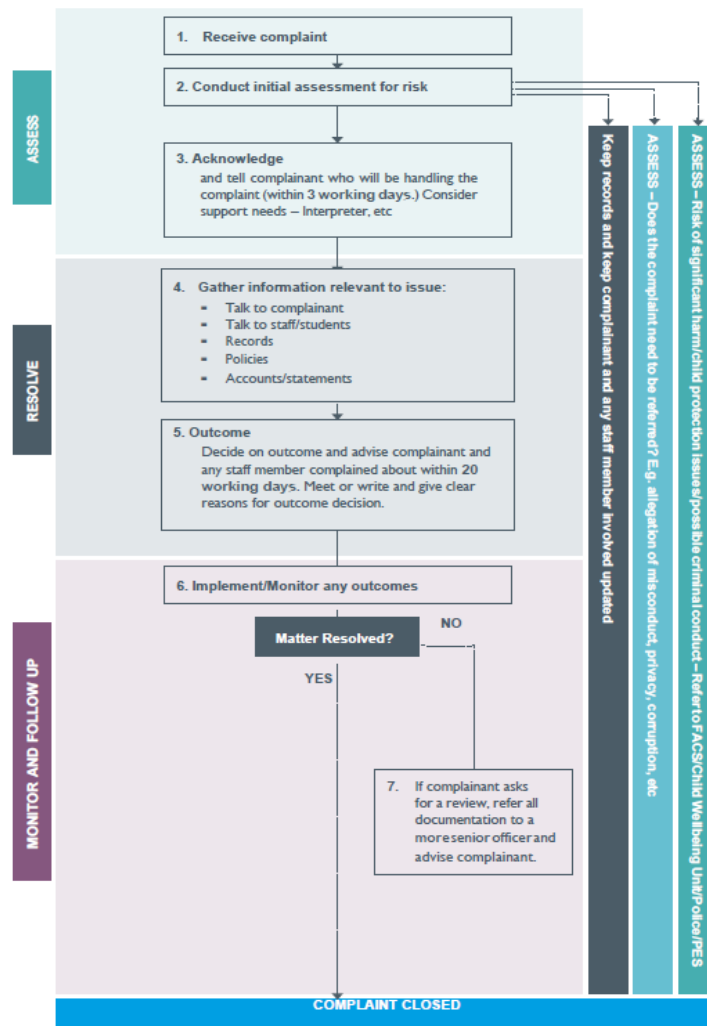
### ***School Community Procedures***

This procedure outlines how complaints will be handled by Camden South Public School.

Our complaint procedure is intended to:

- enable us to respond well to complaints, and
- resolve complaints in a timely, fair and helpful manner

### **School Community Complaints Flow Chart**



### **Receiving a Complaint:**

Any staff member may receive a complaint. The receiving staff member should assess the complaint to identify any immediate health, safety or security risks. The person who receives a complaint should immediately action and/or escalate to the principal or workplace manager if there are risks. Any identified risks and risk management actions should then be documented by the principal or workplace manager.

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If the complaint is not being referred to a specialist area and cannot be resolved directly by the staff member, a complaint manager should be identified by the principal or workplace manager. Any employee who has sufficient knowledge and authority about the complaint issue, may manage the complaint.

Most complaints are best resolved promptly at the local level. In schools, the classroom or subject teacher is often the best person to handle routine concerns about matters within their classroom and/or area of responsibility. Some complaints will need the involvement of the principal, workplace manager or another executive staff member. As issues are clarified, a complaint may be handed to another suitable complaint manager (for example, a teacher).

Few complaints should require management at the director level. Some complaints received at the director or executive level may also be suitable to be referred to the school or workplace.

In many cases, staff can manage a complaint made directly to them, even if the complaint relates to their actions. For example: where a parent complains to the classroom teacher about their programming or student behaviour management, the teacher may be able to respond to the complaint. This often also best meets the parent's needs.

#### Acknowledging the complaint

Complaint managers should:

- acknowledge the complaint as soon as possible, if possible within 3 working days. This can be done in person, by telephone, email or formally in writing. If acknowledgement was made verbally, it should still be documented by the complaint manager
- let the complainant know that they will be kept up to date with progress
- keep the matter as confidential as possible by only sharing information with those who need to know about the complaint issues
- listen carefully to the issues and resolve the complaint directly

#### Assessing, gathering information and resolving the complaint

It is important to determine what the complaint is about. This may require going back to the complainant to clarify their concerns. For verbal

complaints, it is useful to document the complaint issues, provide these to the complainant and ask them to confirm that the complaint has been characterised accurately.

Gather enough information to allow a proper assessment of the concerns as quickly as possible.

Complaints should be finalised as soon as possible and no later than 20 working days. Complaint managers must keep people updated on the progress of their complaint. If a delay is anticipated, inform the complainant and other parties and provide reasons for the delay.

Consider any reasonable outcomes suggested by the complainant and any staff member complained about. However, ultimately the complaint manager determines how a complaint is to be resolved.

Outcomes will depend on the circumstances of each complaint and take into account any statutory requirements. Complaint managers should consider flexible approaches wherever possible.

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### Providing information about the complaint outcome

Complaint managers should provide information about the outcome to the complainant. This may be in a meeting or by telephone or email.

When giving the outcome information, explain:

- the outcome of the complaint and any action that is going to be taken, by whom and when
- the reason/s for the decision
- any internal or external options for review.

In any case, the complaint outcome should always be confirmed in writing. Email is acceptable.

Complex complaints may require additional record keeping (for example, file notes of contentious meetings).

While it's good practice to provide as much information as you can about outcomes, it is important keep confidential specific personal details about the management of staff. If a person is the subject of a complaint, they should also be provided with information about the outcome.

### Implementing outcome actions

Take all reasonable steps to implement and monitor the outcomes of the complaint. Where the outcomes relate to whole of school or work area processes, the principal or other workplace manager should oversee progress and / or delegate responsibility to a specific member of staff with relevant responsibilities.

### Record Keeping

Complaint managers should document:

- their contacts with the complainant
- how they managed the complaint
- the outcome of the complaint, including how and whether any concerns were substantiated and the actions taken in response
- the steps taken to follow up any outcome actions.

Staff resolving complaints immediately at the local level should use their professional judgment to decide what, if any, records to keep.

### Reviews

Complainants may request a review of the complaint outcome if they have information that:

- the complaint outcome was incorrect and/or
- the complaint handling process was unfair.

Requests should be in writing and give the reasons for the request for review and which particular part of their complaint is the subject of their review request. The request should be addressed to the initial complaint manager or their supervisor. Requests for review should be made within 10 working days from the initial complaint decision, unless there are circumstances that may have reasonably prevented the complainant from requesting the review within 10 days.

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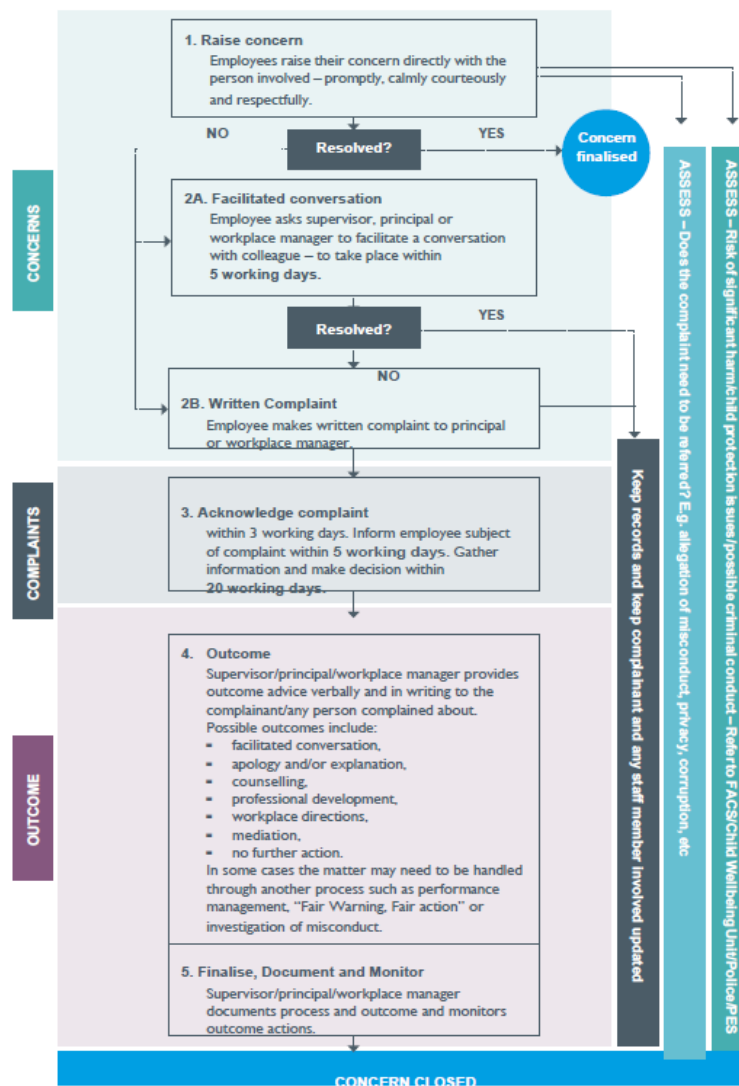
## Staff Procedures

This procedure outlines the processes for staff to follow when making and managing work related complaints (referred to as staff complaints) and should be read together with the Dignity and Respect in the Workplace Charter.

Staff complaints can cover a range of concerns, such as:

- interpersonal conflict or disagreement between staff
- disagreements about how work is allocated or managed
- disagreements about the application of workplace policies
- staff behaviour
- other perceived unfairness in workplace decisions, systems or policies.

### Staff Complaints Flow Chart



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### Resolving concerns directly

The Department expects all staff to identify and raise workplace concerns as informally as possible. Staff are required to work cooperatively and respectfully to resolve concerns.

If a staff member has concerns about the behaviour of a colleague (other than child protection or serious misconduct concerns) they should promptly raise those concerns directly with the person involved, in a calm and respectful manner. In many circumstances, a respectful conversation will resolve a concern or interpersonal conflict. If a staff member does not feel confident to raise an issue alone, they may seek the assistance of a mutually agreed member of staff to attend the discussion.

If the direct conversation does not resolve the concerns, the staff member may ask their manager, another suitable manager or member of the executive, to facilitate a conversation with the colleague. The conversation should take place within 5 working days of any request.

If a staff member has concerns about a workplace decision, system or policy, they should raise those concerns directly with the decision maker or their principal / workplace manager (for systems and policy matters) as soon as possible. In many circumstances, a respectful conversation will allow the decision, system or policy to be explained or for the decision to be reconsidered.

### Making a staff complaint

Where the staff member continues to have workplace concerns after the discussion/s or facilitated conversation/s detailed above, they can consider making a formal complaint. Any complaint should be made promptly. Staff are encouraged to put their complaint in writing. The complaint should state:

- the nature and full details of the complaint
- the parties involved
- the circumstances giving rise to the complaint
- the current situation
- the issues (without extraneous material)
- the outcome/s sought.

Staff should give their written complaint to their immediate workplace manager. The principal or workplace manager will appoint a complaint manager to manage the complaint process. However, if the complaint is about their manager or someone more senior, the staff member should provide the complaint to the supervisor of the person the complaint is about, to manage the matter. If the complaint is about a staff member from another school or work area, the complaint should be provided to their principal or immediate workplace manager.

A complaint of racism can be raised with the Anti- Racism Contact Officer, who can provide advice about the process and information about who will handle the complaint, including whether it may need to be referred.

All staff involved in a complaint must keep complaint information confidential and only discuss the complaint process on a 'need to know' basis. Complaint managers and other managers should remind staff involved in the complaints process of the support available via the Employee Assistance Program and/or their union or professional association.

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Any staff member may have a support person present at a complaint handling meeting. The support person must not have a conflict of interest (for example, a direct involvement with the complaint issues) and should not respond on behalf of the staff member unless the complaint manager agrees they may assist.

### Assess risk and refer certain complaints

When a staff member makes a complaint, the receiving staff member should initially assess the complaint to identify any immediate health, safety or security risks and escalate to the principal or workplace manager if there are risks. Any identified risks and risk management actions should then be documented by the principal or workplace manager.

### Assessing, gathering information and resolving the complaint

Complaint managers should acknowledge staff complaints promptly and within 3 working days.

Complaint managers should assess the staff member's concerns to identify the complaint issues as soon as practicable. If the staff member prefers to make their complaint verbally, the complaint manager should document the complaint and ask the complainant to confirm that the concerns have been correctly characterised by signing the document.

The complaint manager should advise any person who is being complained about, of the complaint issues and give them the opportunity to respond and participate in resolving the issues. While the person who is being complained about needs to know the complaint issues, they do not need to be provided with a copy of the complaint.

The complaint manager should focus on gathering information relevant to the complaint issues, in a way that:

- is fair, impartial and thorough
- maintains confidentiality where possible
- gives involved staff an opportunity to provide a response

Complaint managers may also need to gather additional information, including:

- information and/or accounts from students, employees or other areas of the Department
- policies and procedures
- copies of other departmental documents such as forms, reports, etc
- copies of previous correspondence
- further information from the complainant and any person complained about

All staff, including the complainant, must assist complaint managers with their inquiries and respond promptly and co-operatively when a complaint manager makes any reasonable requests for information

Once relevant information has been gathered, the complaint manager should determine the best option(s) for resolving the complaint.

Outcomes will depend on the seriousness of the complaint issues, the strength of the information gathered, any reasonable outcome(s) suggested by the staff involved, any whole of school or workplace issues (e.g. workplace culture) and any other systems issues.

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Complaints should be finalised within 20 working days from receipt of the complaint. If a delay is anticipated and that time frame will not be met, complaint managers should update the staff involved, about the expected timeframes.

#### Providing reasons for the complaint outcome

At the end of the process, complaint managers should inform the complainant and any staff member who was complained about of:

- the outcome of the complaint and any action that is going to be taken
- the reason/s for the decision
- the review option.

If the complaint manager advises the complainant or other staff member of the outcome at a meeting, they should confirm the advice by email or a letter.

#### Implementing outcome actions

If an outcome from the complaint requires action, there needs to be a plan for implementing and monitoring the outcome. The plan does not need to be formal, but it should identify who is responsible for the outcome and any timeframes for implementation and/or monitoring.

#### Record Keeping

Complaint managers should document the key steps taken to manage the complaint, information gathered, outcome/s of the complaint, including whether any concerns were substantiated and the outcome actions and steps taken to follow up and monitor outcome actions, including details of any reviews of work processes or systems.

#### Reviews

A complainant and/or the staff member complained about may request a review of the complaint managers decision if they can give reasons why the complaint outcome was incorrect or how the complaint handling process was unfair.

Requests should be in writing and give the reasons for the request for review and which particular part of their complaint is the subject of their review request. The request should be addressed to the complaint manager or their supervisor.

The request should be made within 10 working days from receipt of the written outcome, unless there are special circumstances (for example, illness).

A manager not previously involved in managing the complaint undertakes the review. In most cases this will be the next line manager, or a manager at peer level to the original complaint manager. The reviewer should not have any actual conflict of interest. The review should be completed within 20 working days from the receipt of the request, wherever possible from the initial complaint decision, unless there are circumstances that may have reasonably prevented the complainant from requesting the review within 10 days.

#### Supporting Documents

School Community and Complaints Procedure

Staff Complaints Procedure

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