

Complaints Procedures (Community)

Updated May 2025

Rationale

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

These procedures only apply to concerns raised by the members of the community about the department's products, services, employees and/or complaints handling. This includes complaints made by:

- current and former students, and other learners such as children attending public preschools
- parents, carers and families of students and other learners
- former employees
- pre-service teachers, special religious educators and volunteers engaged by the department
- the department's employees, when raising concerns about their experience as a community member, for example, when raising concerns about their child's experience at a public school
- any other person in the community.

These procedures do not apply to situations outside the department's workplaces or when an employee raises a workplace concern.

1. Addressing concerns

Any person can raise an issue or concern about any aspect of the services provided by the department. Concerns should be raised and addressed fairly, impartially, promptly, locally and as informally as possible, with regard to the relevant procedure or process for addressing the specific nature of the concern.

Parents, carers, students, learners and other community members are responsible for raising their concerns directly with the decision maker, principal or manager at the time of, or at a reasonable point after, the event or situation.

Managers or their delegates are responsible for addressing concerns that are brought to their attention and can decide on what action to take based on the nature and seriousness of the issue.

Refer to the flowchart for community complaints for more information.

1.1 Manage concerns under the community complaint procedures

A concern is managed under these procedures if it is about:

- the application of policy, procedure or process, including perceived unfairness in decisions and/or the implementation of decisions where there is no applicable appeal or review process
- the department policy, procedure, process or systems, including the perceived fairness, efficiency or effectiveness of policy, procedure, process or system
- any aspect of the services that the department provides, noting that some concerns may be addressed under other processes as appropriate to the circumstances.

1.2 Manage concerns not under the community complaint procedures

Although a person may refer to a concern as a 'complaint' or raise a concern through complaint mechanisms, there are some situations where the community complaint procedures do not apply.

This includes:

- concerns that require specialist handling
 - alleged criminal conduct
 - child protection concerns
 - legal proceedings and requests for payment of damages
 - misconduct by an employee
 - public interest disclosures (PID)
 - racism and religious intolerance
- behaviour of students and other learners
- complaints by employees
- complaints about organisations external to the department
- complaints about early childhood education and outside school hours care services
- suspension, expulsion and out of area enrolment
- decision to restrict access to departmental premises
- data and privacy breaches
- requests for information.

1.3 Complaint handling principles

Complaint handling in the department is fair, efficient and accessible.

The department takes complaints and feedback seriously and is committed to every student learning, growing and belonging in an equitable and outstanding education system.

The department's core business involves seeking feedback and addressing complaints from members of the community, including parents, carers, students, and other learners. This promotes a positive culture, engagement and continuous system improvement.

The following principles underpin how the department manages complaints:

- respectful treatment
- information and accessibility
- effective communication
- taking ownership
- timeliness
- transparency.

2. Making a complaint

2.1 Raise a concern

A person in the community can raise a concern or seek clarification about:

- any aspect of the services that the department provides or contracts
- the department's policies, procedures, processes or systems, including concerns relating to the perceived fairness, efficiency or effectiveness of a policy, procedure, process or system
- the application of policy, procedure or process, including unreasonable delays and the perceived fairness of decision-making
- the behaviour of employees, including unacceptable or improper conduct, the failure to act on complaints, and the failure to declare or appropriately manage a conflict of interest.

The action taken depends on the nature and seriousness of the issue.

3. Ensuring reasonable conduct

3.1 Maintain confidentiality in the complaint process

Everyone involved in a complaint, such as complaint managers, reviewers, complainants, people being complained about and witnesses, must keep complaint information confidential. People should only discuss the complaint process on a 'need to know' basis. Information about a complaint should only be shared appropriately to manage risks, advance the complaint's management and ensure fairness.

Unless authorised by law, do not:

- provide the complainant with a copy of witness accounts, including accounts by a person responding to a complaint and/or any report arising from the complaint
- provide other parties involved in the complaint with a copy of the complaint, witness accounts and/or any report or legal advice arising from the complaint
- disclose personal and/or health information to other parties involved in the complaint without prior consent unless an exemption under the legislation applies.

The complaint manager may request student records to support effective complaint management under the PPIP Act. The complaint manager must not use the information other than to assess the merits of the complaint and will not disclose the information to any other person or agency except as required under this procedure or authorised by law.

A privacy or confidentiality breach by an employee that is deliberate and more than trivial may amount to serious wrongdoing and must be reported to Professional and Ethical Standards for assessment.

3.2 Disclose conflicts of interest

Conflicts of interest arise when there is a perceived, potential or actual conflict between a person's private interests and public duties. For a conflict of interest to exist, there needs to be more than a professional relationship or circumstances where the person gave a direction to make a particular decision or acted in response to a decision.

Employees must proactively declare any conflict of interest that would affect the handling or outcome of the complaint and complete a Conflict of interest declaration. Employees must cooperate fully with any management action implemented to deal with actual or perceived conflicts of interests.

A person will not be prevented from managing a complaint or review solely because they have information about a situation, have been involved in other decisions about an employee, or have supervised people involved in the situation.

A failure to declare or appropriately manage a conflict of interest may amount to serious wrongdoing and must be reported to PES for assessment.

3.3 Maintain respectful and reasonable conduct during the complaint process

Effective complaint resolution depends on all parties behaving in a respectful and reasonable manner. While making or responding to a complaint can be stressful, the standards of behaviour required under the School Community Charter and the Code of ethics and conduct policy document continue to apply during the complaint process.

3.4 Protect against detrimental action

Detrimental action includes, but is not limited to, an action that causes injury, loss or damage to the person raising the complaint and/or a student or other learners. Examples of detrimental actions include intimidation, bullying, harassment, unfavourable treatment, disciplinary action or damage caused to reputation. It may also involve implementing persistent behaviour management interventions for a student or other learner, such as detention, suspension or expulsion, where this is unreasonable.

Detrimental action does not include responding to unreasonable conduct by a complainant, including action under the *Inclosed Lands Protection Act 1901*.

Employees must not:

- take detrimental action against a person for making a report, providing evidence or raising a complaint
- take detrimental action against a student or other learner if their parent or carer makes a complaint
- seek to directly discuss a person's report, evidence or complaint where complaint processes have begun without the investigator's or complaint manager's approval.

Managers and principals must act promptly on any reports of employee misconduct, unfair treatment or detrimental action linked to a complaint and refer them to PES for assessment.

3.5 Manage complaint timeframes

Complaints should be addressed promptly and informally whenever possible and as close to the time that the event or situation occurred. While many complaints can be finalised within expected timeframes, some complaints may take longer.

A complaint manager must:

- manage the complainant's expectations about the complaint process and timeframe
- provide reasonable updates about progress in the same way the complaint was received or as a complainant requests
- communicate any delay or alteration to a timeframe
- advise when more information can be expected.

4. Managing and closing a complaint

4.1 Nominate a complaint manager

When a manager or principal receives a complaint, they should assess the risk and consider the nature and seriousness of the concern before referring or delegating it. Where possible, a manager should:

- resolve concerns promptly and informally at the local level
- have the expertise to resolve the specific concerns
- have the authority to decide the outcome and action to be taken
- not have any actual or perceived conflicts of interest that could foreseeably arise while managing the complaint.

Where possible and appropriate, the local school level manages complaints about school operations. The relevant policy owner manages the department's policy, procedure, or process complaints.

Complaint managers need an understanding of the complaint process but do not need to be member of the school executive.

4.2 Resolve early and locally

Many concerns raised can be resolved locally, quickly and efficiently. Most complaints are managed by the relevant school or service, consistent with the principle of resolving complaints locally and informally where possible.

The complaint manager should consider whether:

- the concern requires specialist handling
- the person raising the concern indicates a desire to discuss the matter informally and this is appropriate in the circumstances
- the available information supports a view that the complaint has arisen from a misunderstanding or miscommunication.

If the concern is resolved early and informally, the complaint manager must record the outcome, and include:

- the complainant's contact information (if known)
- the nature of complaint issue or concern
- the agreed outcome.

4.3 Clarify expectations and acknowledge receipt

The complaint process begins with effective communication and clear expectations between the complaint manager and the complainant.

Here are some considerations:

- Acknowledge receipt within **3 business days** where practicable (business days exclude weekends, public holidays and holiday periods).
- Consider the concerns and the situation from the complainant's point of view.

- Manage the complainant's expectations from the outset by asking them what outcome they expect. Explain the process, what is likely and achievable, and how and when information will be communicated.
- Consider any adjustments to assist a person to participate in the complaint process.
- Provide clear advice about what concerns will be addressed under these procedures and what will be addressed under other processes.
- Provide information about the expected timeframe for addressing the complaint, considering the situation's complexity, employee availability, holiday periods and other factors.
- Record the acknowledgement of the complaint.

4.3.1 Acknowledge a complaint

Who can acknowledge a complaint:

- the complaint manager
- the person receiving the complaint

How to acknowledge a complaint:

- in person
- by telephone
- by email
- in writing
- in the same way it was received or as a complainant prefers.

What to include:

- information on these procedures and next steps
- information on the complaint manager's role
- advice on the level of involvement the complainant will have with their complaint
- information on anticipated timeframes and how they will be kept up to date on the progress of their complaint
- information on privacy and confidentiality obligations.

4.3.2 Identify and understand the concerns

Some complaints may include multiple concerns. The complaint manager decides which aspects of the complaint should be managed under these procedures and which aspects should be managed through other processes.

As a first step, the complaint manager engages with the complainant to identify and understand the nature of the concerns. They can do this by:

- listening carefully, clarifying the concerns and asking for more information when needed to identify the reason(s) for their concern, particularly when a complaint is raised verbally
- explaining the process, and how and when information will be communicated
- asking the complainant what outcome they are seeking and explaining possible outcomes

- asking the complainant what action has been taken previously to address their concerns, such as meetings or alternative dispute resolution
- explaining to the complainant that information may be sought from other parties to inform the assessment of the complaint
- asking the complainant what adjustments they may need to be able to participate in the complaint process.

For ongoing management, the complaints manager can:

- summarise the concerns and seek the complainant's agreement about the nature of the complaint, particularly where clarifying information indicates that the complaint issue is different from the original
- request the complainant summarise their main concerns to ensure the complaint has been accurately recorded
- document additional information provided by the complainant
- organise information using timelines or mind maps when there are multiple concerns or where the situation has evolved over time
- consider whether a PES report is required using the PES Reporting Guide

At all times, the complaint manager must:

- manage the complainant's expectations from the outset by explaining what can be done to address their concern and why this is the case
- consider whether the concerns raised in the complaint have previously been addressed, including whether the complainant is entitled to an internal review of the handling of a previous complaint
- clearly state what will and will not be considered in the complaint.

If a complainant does not respond to requests for information within a reasonable time, the complaint manager can assess and finalise the complaint with the available information. What is reasonable will depend on the circumstances and will include consideration for illness, accessibility barriers, religious holidays, and cultural obligations such as Sorry Business.

When a complainant identifies themselves but asks that their identity not be provided to the relevant school or service, the complaint is not an anonymous complaint. The complaint manager should:

- make it clear that, although the department will take reasonable steps to keep the person's details from being disclosed to the school or service, they may be identified through other means
- explain that their details will be recorded
- provide information about the complaint handling process and what will happen in response to the complaint.

4.3.3 Manage low risk, historic and group complaints

The complaint manager can decide to:

- limit the scope of inquiry to exclude concerns that are reasonably assessed to
 - be of low risk

- be without substance
- have been considered and finalised previously
- relate to a situation that occurred more than 12 months ago or could reasonably be considered too long ago to allow meaningful inquiries or opportunity for resolution
- address complaints made by a group of people on an individual basis
- limit the scope of inquiry or finalise a complaint if the complainant indicates that they do not wish to proceed, taking into consideration the nature and seriousness of the concern(s)
- refer complaints to another organisation if they are misdirected to the department.

4.3.4 Ensure cultural and psychological safety in the complaint

The complaint manager must take reasonable steps to ensure cultural and psychological safety in the complaint process by:

- eliminating barriers or biases, either conscious or unconscious, that may prevent a person from raising concerns or impact the successful resolution of issues
- being open, focusing on a mutually desirable outcome and normalising complaints as part of the improvement process.

This may be addressed by asking the person, 'What do you need?' or 'What will work for you?'

4.3.5 Support for complainants in the complaint process

A complainant can choose to have either a support person or advocate present at a meeting related to a complaint. The complainant is responsible for arranging a support person or advocate. The complaint manager may suggest a support person or advocate if the complainant has not organised support themselves.

An **advocate** is authorised to speak and make decisions for the person making the complaint to assist in reaching a resolution. A **support person** may speak at a meeting but must not speak on behalf of, advocate for, or make decisions for, the complainant.

A suitable support person is someone over 18 years who may be an employee, a family member, a friend, a union representative, or a legal representative who has no special rights or status while in the role of a support person. A person is not suitable as a support person if they are under 18 years, may pose a risk to the safety of others, and/or someone who is unable to commit to maintaining confidentiality.

A complaint manager can decide that a person's nominated support person is not suitable after considering potential risks, perceived or actual conflicts of interest (for example, direct involvement with the complaint concerns), or other factors that may suggest the nominated support person's involvement would be unreasonable in the circumstances. The complaint manager should explain why the person is not suitable and ask the person to nominate an alternative support person

4.3.6 Provide adjustments to support the complainant

The department provides reasonable adjustments to support people to communicate a concern. Adjustments may be required to support people with disability or culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse communities. This may include interpretation and translation or a meeting with a complainant to clarify and record the details of the concern.

The department provides reasonable adjustments for students to ensure that they do not experience disadvantages or barriers when raising or resolving a concern. Complaint managers should ask the student: 'What do you need?' or 'What will work for you?'.

4.3.7 Manage an anonymous complaint

The department is responsible for addressing concerns that are received anonymously. Anonymous complaints are managed in the same way as any other community complaint where practicable, noting that a response cannot be provided to the person raising the concern.

The complaint manager:

- must assess the complaint and report concerns that require specialist handling, including alleged criminal conduct, child protection concerns or potential misconduct by an employee
- must take reasonable steps to address the concerns and address any underlying issues identified through the complaint process
- The complaint manager can decide to address the concerns or finalise an anonymous complaint based on the available information, after considering:
 - the nature and seriousness of the concern
 - the available avenues of inquiry
 - the time that has passed
- whether further information can reasonably be obtained to adequately understand and address the concern.

A situation where a person provides their details but requests that their identity is not disclosed to others is **not considered to be an anonymous complaint**.

4.4 Assess a complaint

Complaint managers do not need to gather evidence or investigate complaints for the purpose of making findings or determinations. The complaint manager determines what action, if any, to take to address the concerns identified in the complaint and communicates the outcome to relevant parties.

The complaint manager gathers relevant information in a manner that:

- is fair and impartial
- is sufficient to understand the concern
- maintains confidentiality and only shares information where necessary
- gives involved employees an opportunity to provide a response.

Steps to consider:

- identify, analyse and treat any risks
- determine the scope of any inquiries
- gather information relevant to the concerns
- finalise a complaint **within 20 business days** (business days exclude weekends, public holidays and holiday periods).

While many complaints can be finalised within expected timeframes, some complaints may take longer in consideration of individual circumstances.

4.5 Determine the outcome

Once the relevant information has been gathered, the complaint manager should decide the complaint's outcome and the best option(s) for addressing any systemic or underlying issues.

Steps to consider:

- decide if any decisions that were made in the original handling of the situation were reasonable in the circumstances
- decide if a policy, procedure, process or system needs to be reviewed and/or amended in light of the concerns raised
- address any systemic or underlying issues.

Outcomes will depend on:

- the nature and seriousness of the concerns
- the time that has passed
- the strength of the information gathered
- any reasonable outcome(s) suggested by the parties
- any whole of school or workplace issues, including culture
- any other systemic issues.

Sometimes the complaint manager may not be able to change what has happened or will decide that the original handling of a situation was reasonable in the circumstances. Whatever the outcome, the complaint manager will give clear reasons and seek to restore relationships between parties where appropriate.

4.6 Close the complaint

The complaint manager closes the complaint, **within 20 business days** (business days exclude weekends, public holidays and holiday periods), when:

- a decision has been made
- the outcome has been communicated to all relevant parties
- the information about the complaint and its outcome has been recorded and stored securely in accordance with these procedures
- a plan is in place for monitoring the progress of any action to be taken as a result of the complaint.

4.6.1 Communicate an outcome with complainant and other relevant parties

The complaint manager must communicate the outcome to the complainant and other relevant parties involved in the complaint process. The level of information provided:

- must consider the person's role in the complaint process and their need to know
- should be sufficient to demonstrate that the complaint has been addressed fairly and impartially.

While the complainant needs to know the nature of the action taken to address their concerns, they do not receive a copy of reports or other documents relating to the complaint's management, or direct

evidence gathered by the complaint manager, such as accounts from other parties. In many situations, a meeting or a brief email summarising details of the complaint's outcome is sufficient.

Communication must be accessible, readable and understandable. The complaint manager maintains a record of any verbal advice to a complainant and relevant parties in relation to the outcome.

4.6.2 *Communicate the outcome*

How to communicate the outcome:

- in person, for example, a meeting
- by telephone
- by email
- in writing
- in the same way the complaint was received or as a complainant requires to support their understanding of the outcome.

What to include in the communication:

- the outcome and reason(s) for the decision
- the action (if any) that is going to be taken, by whom and when
- a brief summary of what the complaint was about
- a brief summary of the action taken to obtain and assess information about the complaint
- the information, policies, procedures and processes that were considered
- an acknowledgement of the person's perspective about their experience and the impact of the issues they raised
- an apology (if appropriate to the circumstances)
- an acknowledgement of the person's contribution to addressing and resolving the complaint
- an invitation to make contact if they want to discuss the decision
- a contact name and contact details for the complaint manager
- the advice about the internal review option
- the process of what will happen after the complaint is finalised.

The complaint manager closes the complaint when:

- a decision has been made
- the outcome has been communicated to all relevant parties
- the information about the complaint has been recorded
- the outcome has been stored securely following these procedures.

Expected timeframes

A complaint should be finalised within 20 business days (business days exclude weekends, public holidays and holiday periods).

4.7 Follow up on required actions

The complaint manager must implement a plan for monitoring the progress of any action taken due to the complaint. The plan can be informal, but it should identify who is responsible for any actions and the timeframes for implementation. The relevant line manager will be responsible for monitoring progress.

Considerations

- Check in with complainant within 20 business days (business days exclude weekends, public holidays and holiday periods) or within a reasonable time of the complaint being finalised to confirm that agreed actions have been progressed and/or completed.
- Discuss whether any restorative action is required and who should progress this.

At the point of follow up

The manager responsible for monitoring progress makes reasonable inquiries to determine whether:

- the action taken was as agreed
- the action taken has effectively addressed the concerns.

The manager decides what additional action, if any, should be taken, with consideration of the concerns' nature and seriousness.

5. Reviewing the complaint process and outcome

5.1 Internal review

Only one internal review will be conducted in relation to the handling of a complaint. This includes a review conducted by an external party directly engaged by the department. This is the final level of review conducted by the department.

An internal review is an assessment of the complaint handling. It can be conducted by:

- a manager not previously involved in managing the complaint
- the next line manager, or a manager at peer level to the original complaint manager.

A review considers the way the complaint was handled, and whether the complaint's outcome was reasonable in all the circumstances.

5.2 External review

A person can:

- seek independent advice about external review options
- seek an external review if they are not satisfied with the outcome of an internal review
- raise their concerns with an external agency at any time.

Appendix 1	Complaints Handling Policy
Appendix 2	School Community Charter
Appendix 3	Community Complaint Checklist
Appendix 4	Complaint templates
Appendix 5	Conflict of Interest Declaration
Appendix 6	Support Person and Advocate