



Complaints and Grievances *(Executive Summary)*

Macarthur Anglican School is committed to the development of a complaints and grievance procedure that allows parents, students, members of the public and staff to make complaints when dissatisfied with an aspect of the school.

Rationale

In order to meet the guidelines of best practice Macarthur Anglican School has developed complaint guidelines and procedures to help resolve and where possible avoid potential dissatisfaction.

There are essentially four areas of complaints:

- parents (and guardians);
- students;
- the public, and
- staff.

It is a condition of Accreditation and Registration, that a school has a dispute resolution procedure. While parents will often wish to raise issues on behalf of their children, there are other issues, which students may choose to raise on their own behalf, and which are best raised by them. Complaints from members of the public will be treated in a similar way to complaints from parents, although most complaints from the public will normally be referred directly to the Headmaster or the Deputy Headmaster.

Complaint Handling Principles

- The School is committed to effective complaints handling and values feedback through complaints.
- Complaints will be taken seriously and dealt with appropriately.
- Where complaints involve criticisms or allegations against other staff, students, parents or volunteers the principles of Procedural Fairness will apply.
- Complaints will be dealt with in a timely manner with an appropriate degree of urgency and the complainant is kept informed throughout the process.
- After a complaint is received the complainant will be contacted within five business days confirming receipt of the complaint and the proposed process to be followed in dealing with it subject to appropriate consultation with the complainant as to the process.
- Complaints will be dealt with in an objective and unbiased manner.
- Personal information related to complaints will be confidential.
- Opportunities for further review of the complaint will be made available to the complainant and respondent.

Parental Complaints

In order to maintain an open organisation it is essential that parents believe that the school is willing to hear their concerns. The interests of the school are better served when parents are able to express their concerns to a member of staff as opposed to sharing their dissatisfaction with others. It is important that parents believe they are valued, involved and encouraged to express their concerns.

An open school is one that:

- Listens to parents and students;
- Provides an environment in which parents feel comfortable in contacting the Headmaster or other Senior Staff, Heads of School, Heads of House, House Tutors and Class Teachers, and
- Staff are comfortable in dealing with complaints.

An effective complaints procedure can diffuse problems and can provide the School with helpful information. Complaints treated as constructive suggestions can be used to improve standards and may prevent further complaint. Even unjustified complaints may indicate areas that can be improved.

What constitutes a Complaint

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived situation. A complaint may be made by a parent if a parent thinks that the School or one of its employees has, for example:

- Done something wrong;
- Failed to do something it should have done, or
- Acted unfairly or impolitely.

A complaint may be made about:

- The School as a whole;
- A particular facet of the School or group within the School, or
- An individual member of staff.

All complaints need to be handled seriously. A gentle expression of concern, or a simple query, may grow into a major matter if parents feel that they have not been taken seriously or brushed aside. Often matters that have the potential to become very problematic can fade into insignificance if they are handled well in the initial stage. Procedures need to be flexible to handle both formal complaints and the informal raising of issues. Complaints against members of staff need particularly sensitive handling. All complaints need to have written records kept.

Lines of Approach

As Macarthur Anglican School provides a system of Pastoral Care, initial contact by parents would normally be made by the parent to the Class Teacher, Faculty Head, Head of House or Head of School. In all instances an appropriate member of senior staff is to be informed of any parental complaints. The appropriate Senior Staff member will ensure that the matter is brought to the attention of the Headmaster

or Deputy Headmaster if required. If staff are approached about a matter that lies outside their area of responsibility, it should be referred to the appropriate person. The parents who made the complaint are to be informed when a matter is referred. Matters incapable of resolution at a particular level should be referred to the appropriate senior person, with parents kept informed of the action being taken. Senior staff will refer such issues directly to the Headmaster, with whom the responsibility for dealing with most complaints lies.

There may be some parents who will wish to go directly to the Headmaster with their concerns, and this may be requested. However, it should be explained that the Headmaster may be delayed in responding to the concern. Written responses to parental complaints are to be discussed with the Deputy Headmaster and should be signed by either the Dean of Studies, Dean of Students, Deputy Headmaster or Headmaster.

Reducing Anxiety

As the person making the complaint may feel vulnerable, the School can reduce anxiety by taking the matter seriously and dispelling uncertainty about how the complaint will be dealt with. The following factors will assist in reducing anxiety:

- Information about the complaints procedure should be clear;
- Complaints are to be acknowledged as soon as practical, but within a maximum of five days. Staff are to inform parents what is happening to their concern or complaint and, if a more detailed response is needed, by what date it will be received. The issue is to be dealt with as quickly as possible, and
- The nature of the complaint and what is concerning the complainant should be clear. If it is not immediately obvious:
 - The parents may need more time to explain;
 - They could be asked to put their complaint in writing, and
 - It may be helpful to discuss possible outcomes.

Recording

The School is to keep an effective record of complaints and other parental concerns. This may be required because:

- It may become the cause of future legal action;
- Patterns in the record may indicate a need for action, and
- Senior Staff should be able to check the records in the student files.

Any record of a complaint is to be filed and is to contain the following:

- Date when the issue was raised;
- Name of parent;
- Name of student;
- Brief statement of the issue;
- Member of staff handling the issue, and
- Brief statement of the outcome including to whom it has been referred if appropriate.

Procedural Fairness

In all complaints matters the principles of procedural fairness will apply where allegations are made against another person whether that be a parent, student or teacher.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is an important issue for students, parents and staff. It is essential that any complaint is treated in a confidential manner and with respect. Parents often seek an assurance of confidentiality before expressing their concerns. It should be made clear to all concerned that it is the School's practice that the Headmaster or Deputy Headmaster are informed of complaints made by parents and that their complaint will not rebound adversely on their children. Similarly, complaints raised by students should not rebound on them or on other students unless disciplinary action is required. The question of confidentiality should be discussed sensitively and on an individual basis with the parents and the School's practice is to be carefully explained. It may be possible to deal with a problem without naming individuals. However, even if no names are given, the source of the complaint may be clear. Depending on the nature of the complaint and on the circumstances, it may be impractical to investigate without identifying the member of staff or the student.

Members of staff are rightly concerned that they should know about complaints that might be damaging to their reputation. Such complaints, where appropriate, will be made known to them and those who need to be consulted. The school will ensure that support is made available to help staff deal not only with complaints made to them, but also with complaints that are made about them. The school is also aware there is a need to provide support for staff against whom a complaint is made. The School will provide free counseling support through Access Programmes for staff members who feel a need. Speaking with the Deputy Headmaster can access this support. If there is a situation involving the Police, the Headmaster, or the next most senior staff member, if the Headmaster is unavailable, must take responsibility for action in the school.

Anonymous Complaints

Anonymous complaints may be where there is no indication of either name or address, or where the complainants say that they do not wish to be identified. They may come from members of the public, parents or from students. Complaints from the public about the behaviour of a group of students will normally be dealt with on a general basis, with reminders to all about school expectations.

Parents and students are encouraged to give their names and should be given reassurance on the issue of confidentiality. If they persist in wishing to remain anonymous, it is at the Headmaster's discretion as to what action, if any, should be taken. Anonymous allegations about Reportable Conduct should be monitored closely but no action taken until there is more certainty about the veracity of the allegation. As a general practice, the Headmaster will disregard anonymous allegations and complaints.

Resolution

Sometimes the very acknowledgment of an issue by the School brings relief to parents. Satisfaction for a complaint may come from any of the following:

- Knowing that changes have been made, and that matters will be different in the future;
- Knowing that the School is now alert to a possible problem;
- Feeling that their concern has been considered seriously, and
- An outcome which may be different from the one they sought, but which they perceive to be well-considered.

If time has been needed to consider matters, parents should receive a letter from either the Headmaster or Deputy Headmaster. This should cover:

- The issues raised;
- How the issues were considered;
- The people consulted, and
- The action that is to be taken.

Intractable Complaints

There may be a small minority of persistent or aggressive complainants who will never be satisfied. The School may discover on investigation that the complaint was without foundation, motivated by malice or without sufficient evidence. Nevertheless, it is wise to treat all complaints seriously and to follow the procedures. Most complaints can be resolved if approached positively. If a complaint becomes intractable, it may be due to its nature or the way in which it was handled. It may of course be possible that the parent perceives the school to have 'closed ranks' against him or her.

In most cases of intractable complaints the Headmaster will raise the matter with the School Council. If the concern relates directly to a member of the Executive, the parents should make an appointment with the Headmaster to discuss this matter.

Support

Given the diverse nature of complaints, the School is to provide support, so that all staff can carry out their responsibilities and feel supported. Access to counselling is obtained by meeting with the Deputy Headmaster.

Student Complaints

The principles that apply to parental complaints should also apply to complaints and concerns from students. There are, however, differences in approaches. One important difference is that students should be able to raise concerns with any member of staff with whom they feel comfortable. It is essential that staff make students aware that staff at the School possess limited confidentiality and may be required, depending on circumstance, to inform the Deputy Headmaster or Headmaster of their complaint.

In more complex situations, once the matter is resolved, a member of staff should discuss the outcome with the student. To make sure that it is fully understood, a written record may be shown to the student. Complaints that appear trivial still need to be handled seriously. Young people may test the complaints procedures on relatively minor issues before finding the confidence to raise something distressing, such as bullying. If the issue is a distressing one, or if investigation of it is taking time, a student may need support from another student or from an adult. Students should be encouraged to choose a person with whom they feel comfortable to provide support.

Complaints, and ways of dealing with them, also need to be explained to students. Personal and Social Education programmes can be of use, not only in teaching students how they support and act as mentors to others, but also in encouraging them to understand that their views matter. The appropriate Head of School will oversee such action.

Review

The last textual change to this policy was in August 2019.