

COMPLAINTS, GRIEVANCES AND DISPUTE RESOLUTION POLICY

POLICY SCOPE: This policy applies to all Waranara School staff.

POLICY APPLICATION: The policy will inform the process for students and their parents/carers to make complaints, lodge appeals, and provide other feedback about school activities, processes and decisions.

POLICY OUTLINE

CONTEXT

Waranara School students enter the school community from a range of diverse backgrounds, with various unique expectations and goals. In line with this diversity, there may be occasions where students or their parents/carers wish to express concerns or provide feedback about their experiences or operational processes within the school environment.

POLICY STATEMENT

All Waranara School students can expect to be consistently treated with dignity and respect, in a non-judgemental and professional environment. Thus, where students have concerns or feedback about their experiences at Waranara School, the school is committed to providing an appropriate forum for the expression and acknowledgement of these views. The school will deal with any complaint received according to social justice principles, in a fair and accountable manner. Where concerns are raised, the school is committed to providing a timely and proportionate response to students and parent/carers or other community members, in line with the participatory principle that all people have a right to raise concerns about incidents which have adversely impacted their education opportunities or personal health and well-being. Further, Waranara School seeks to generate a school environment of openness to feedback, as a critical mechanism for on-going improvement and quality assurance within their education program.

PURPOSE

The complaints and grievances policy is designed to provide all Waranara School students, parents/carer/stakeholders with an official pathway to communicate concerns about school activities, processes or decisions. The policy also provides information for staff about formal responses and documentation required in circumstances when complaints or grievances are raised by students or other parties outside the school community. Responses are outlined for both minor and more serious complaints.

PRINCIPLES

- All Waranara School students have a right to articulate concerns about school decisions/activities that impact them, and be aware of the processes associated with registering complaints
- Waranara School is committed to working collaboratively with students to facilitate a mutually agreeable solution when complaints or concerns are raised
- Confidentiality is a prime consideration during complaints' processes, for both students, parents/carers/stakeholders and staff members
- Where parties are unable to reach agreement about a preferred solution, Waranara School will seek to integrate the principles of restorative justice, procedural fairness and respect in any dispute resolution processes implemented

PROCEDURES FOR RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

INTERACTIONS BETWEEN STUDENTS AND WARANARA SCHOOL

1. Where a staff member receives complaints or critical feedback about Waranara School from students or parents/carers/stakeholders, they are to first offer to address the complaint through informal discussion with the student about possible resolution options.
2. Where a satisfactory solution is not identified after this initial discussion, and a student or parent/carer wishes to pursue their complaint further, staff should:
 - a) Advise students, parents/carers/stakeholders that they can submit their complaint or concerns in writing, on *Waranara School Feedback Form* (see Appendix 1). Staff should provide students with a sealed Waranara School envelope to ensure confidentiality is maintained throughout this process. Students can elect to leave their completed feedback form with a Waranara School staff member, or forms can be submitted to Waranara School via post. Students are to be advised the details of their complaint will be kept confidential, except where discussion of details is required with specific Waranara School staff relevant to the resolution of the concern.
 - OR
 - b) Ask the student, parent/carer/stakeholder if they wish to discuss unresolved concerns directly with the Principal.
3. Where a student does not wish to speak directly with the Principal, or they are unavailable, employees should then document student, parent/carer/stakeholder concerns in writing to the Principal and in Case Notes, if a student. Staff should inform complainants that this document is required as an additional means of accurately documenting their concerns, wherever possible writing the complaint in collaboration with the student, parent/carer/stakeholder. This form should then be submitted for the immediate attention of the Principal.
4. Students, parents/carers/stakeholders should also be informed that the complaint will be forwarded to the Principal, who will take further action as required. (Refer *Complaints/Grievance Process: Flow Charts 1 and 2*)
5. Upon receipt of a written complaint, the Principal will discuss the situation with the staff member involved, and verify solutions explored with the student, parent/carer/stakeholder. Where students have requested further contact, they will then contact the student to explore further solutions.
6. Where a student, parent/carer/stakeholder nominates their preference to speak directly with the Principal through a verbal referral of student complaint from a staff member, the Principal should follow the process as per *Complaints Flow Chart 2*.

RESPONSE TO STUDENT/STAKEHOLDER COMPLAINTS & FEEDBACK: WARANARA SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

1. Waranara School Principal should ensure that all employees are familiar with the format and location of the *Waranara School Feedback Form*.
2. Where the Principal receives a verbal request to speak with a student, parent/carrer/stakeholder regarding a complaint or concern, they are to:
 - a) Confirm the employee has offered the student/stakeholder opportunity to complete a *Feedback Form*.
 - b) Verify the details of the situation, in consultation with the staff member previously assisting the student. Where appropriate, the Principal will support staff members to continue to respond to student concerns directly, offering additional strategies for resolving the matter. (This option should be used only in situations where it is not deemed likely to escalate a complainant's adverse reactions or distress).
 - c) Where it is not appropriate for school staff members to continue to engage with students regarding their concerns, they will be advised that the Principal will seek to make contact with them within the next 24 hours (unless immediate contact is required due to a critical incident or crisis scenario).
 - d) In following up the complaint, the Principal will seek to speak with the student, parent/carer/stakeholder privately, to assist with the resolution of their complaint. Complainants will also be advised they may invite a support person to be present for this meeting.
 - e) For Minor Complaints, after the Principal has spoken with a student, they will then assess the course of action.
 - f) For Major Complaints, the Principal will mandatorily report the matter to the Waranara Management Committee (WMC) as per *Complaints Flow Chart 2*.
3. Where the Principal receives complaints directly from students, parents/carers/stakeholders (without referral from other Waranara School employees), they are to follow processes as outlined in 'Waranara School Staff' procedures above, from Point (2).
4. In the case of a **Minor Complaint** that staff have referred to the Principal:

The Principal will seek to resolve the issue in consultation with the student, parent/carer/stakeholder. If an agreeable solution is identified, no further action is required, unless the Principal deems it necessary to refer information about the concern to the WMC. However, details of the conversation should be recorded in a student's personal file.
5. In the Case of a **Major Complaint**:

The details of the student's, parent/carer/stakeholder's concern should be immediately referred to the Chair of the WMC, who will contact the student, parent/carer/stakeholder to seek resolution of the complaint or contact external authorities if required.

ADDITIONAL PROCEDURAL RESPONSIBILITIES: WARANARA SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

1. The Principal will ensure that all school staff are familiar with the processes associated with the *Waranara School Feedback Form*, to ensure students, parents/carers/stakeholders are able to accurately and independently articulate relevant concerns.
2. The Principal will arrange for the display of *Feedback Forms* in Waranara School reception area, to ensure students, parents/carers/stakeholders have access to documents that will assist them to articulate concerns independently if required.
3. The Principal is to respond to all student/stakeholder complaints received within two days, unless otherwise agreed with student, parent/carer/stakeholder.
4. Where a Major Complaint is received, or related to possible criminal activities, the Principal should report the incident to a relevant statutory authority.

5. The Chair of the WMC should refer Major unresolved Complaints (which do not require external referral) to the Good Shepherd Board of Management (BOM) if there are significant delays or difficulties reaching a satisfactory outcome or resolution.
6. Where a complaint is unable to be resolved after referral to the BOM, the Chair of the WMC should offer a student, parent/carer the opportunity to pursue the matter further through an external review process.
7. Where a complaint relates to the conduct or activities of the school Principal, the Chair of the WMC will refer these concerns to the BOM for further action.

GOOD SHEPHERD AUSTRALIA NEW ZEALAND BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

1. Where concerns are referred to the Good Shepherd Board of Management, the Board (or Board representative) will work with the Chair of the WMC to develop additional strategies for resolution of a student or parent/carer's complaint.
2. Where the Board receives a complaint related to the Chair of the WMC, they will seek to develop a resolution of concerns with the collaboration of the Chair of the WMC and student. Where this is not possible, the matter will be referred to an external party for independent review.

ACCESS TO WARANARA SCHOOL FEEDBACK/COMPLAINTS FORMS

School Reception Area

Waranara School Feedback Forms will be accessible to students and other stakeholders in a visible location within the school reception area.

Location of Computerised Version of Feedback Form

Staff will be able to access a computerised version of the Feedback Form via the shared Waranara School network folder, which is accessible to all paid school staff. A soft copy for students, parents/carers/stakeholders will be available on the school's website.

ADDITIONAL PROCEDURAL INFORMATION for STAFF

All students that are enrolled at Waranara School are to be informed of their right to complain if they feel that their education program or school operational processes/personnel are not satisfactory.

A complaint can be defined as anything that a student thinks is procedurally unfair, or that leaves them dissatisfied with school staff or processes. All students are encouraged to voice their grievances with staff, who have been instructed to actively listen to complaints raised. All students are to be made aware that information given to staff members will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. This means that the name or identity of the person complaining, and any other private information, will only be disclosed to people who need to know about the concerns in order to effectively resolve the matter.

Documents used in the process of resolving complaints are to be distributed on a need-to-know basis only, along with the final outcome of the investigation. Complainants (and other people who provide information during the course of an investigation) are to be protected from any repercussions, reprisals or victimisation which may occur as a result of making a complaint.

Informal level (for Minor Complaints)

All staff have the ability and authority to discuss and resolve the matter directly with the student as quickly as possible. Staff will record their decisions and actions in the student's Case Notes. If the complaint is not resolved, staff should refer the matter to the school Principal, who will provide information about the next level of action or other external options.

Formal level (for Major Complaints)

The complaint is reported to the Principal who is the person designated to respond formally to Major Complaints. The Principal will explain fully to the student what is involved at this level, the people, time frames, records, agreements (written/oral) and how complaints can be conciliated.

Where a staff member is the subject of a complaint, they will be informed as soon as possible and asked for their response to the allegations.

A time limit will be set for a response to be given to the student, parent/carer/stakeholder, who will be kept informed of all developments.

Records will be kept of meetings and agreements which will be signed by the people involved in the process.

Major Complaints and External Referral

Complaints which involve criminal allegations, assault, serious misconduct, fraud and corrupt behaviour must be directed to the police or other bodies.

External Review of Complaint Options

When complaints cannot be resolved internally to a student or stakeholder's satisfaction, Waranara School will offer external options to the student. These include:

- An independent external review e.g. a review panel comprising a majority of people outside the service or
- A mediation service arranged with a body such as the Community Justice Centre.
- All complaints received will be reviewed by the WMC and the Board in order to ensure that the school is providing the best service possible and to monitor if changes need to be put in place to ensure that no further complaints are received.

Additional External Review Options Available to the Stakeholders

Should a student, parent/carer/stakeholder be dissatisfied with the final complaint review decision reached by Waranara School, they should be informed of external options to pursue resolution of their complaint. These include:

- Community Legal Centres
- Anti-Discrimination Board
- NSW Ombudsman

Ombudsman Contact Information:

NSW Ombudsman
Level 24, 580 George Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Phone: 9286 1000

Toll Free: 1800 451 524

Email: nswombo@ombo.nsw.gov.au

Website: www.nswombudsman.nsw.gov.au

REFERENCES

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

Grievance/Complaints Process – Flow Charts 1 and 2.

DEFINITIONS

Minor Complaint: An expression of concern about general day-to-day operational processes or activities within Waranara School. In general, staff are able to resolve these matters through effective communication and problem-solving techniques. These matters do not relate to critical incidents, formal student appeals, complaints against staff members, or serious safety concerns.

Major Complaint: Concerns regarding critical incidents, formal student appeals, complaints against school staff members or serious safety concerns are deemed major complaints. Further, where a complainant's level of distress or emotionality in discussing minor complaints has escalated such that positive staff communication strategies prove ineffective in minimising distress, these concerns may also be deemed a major complaint. Incidents/issues that require external referral for resolution may also constitute a major complaint. Where a staff member is unsure, these matters should be discussed with the School Principal, who will determine an appropriate classification for and response to concerns raised.

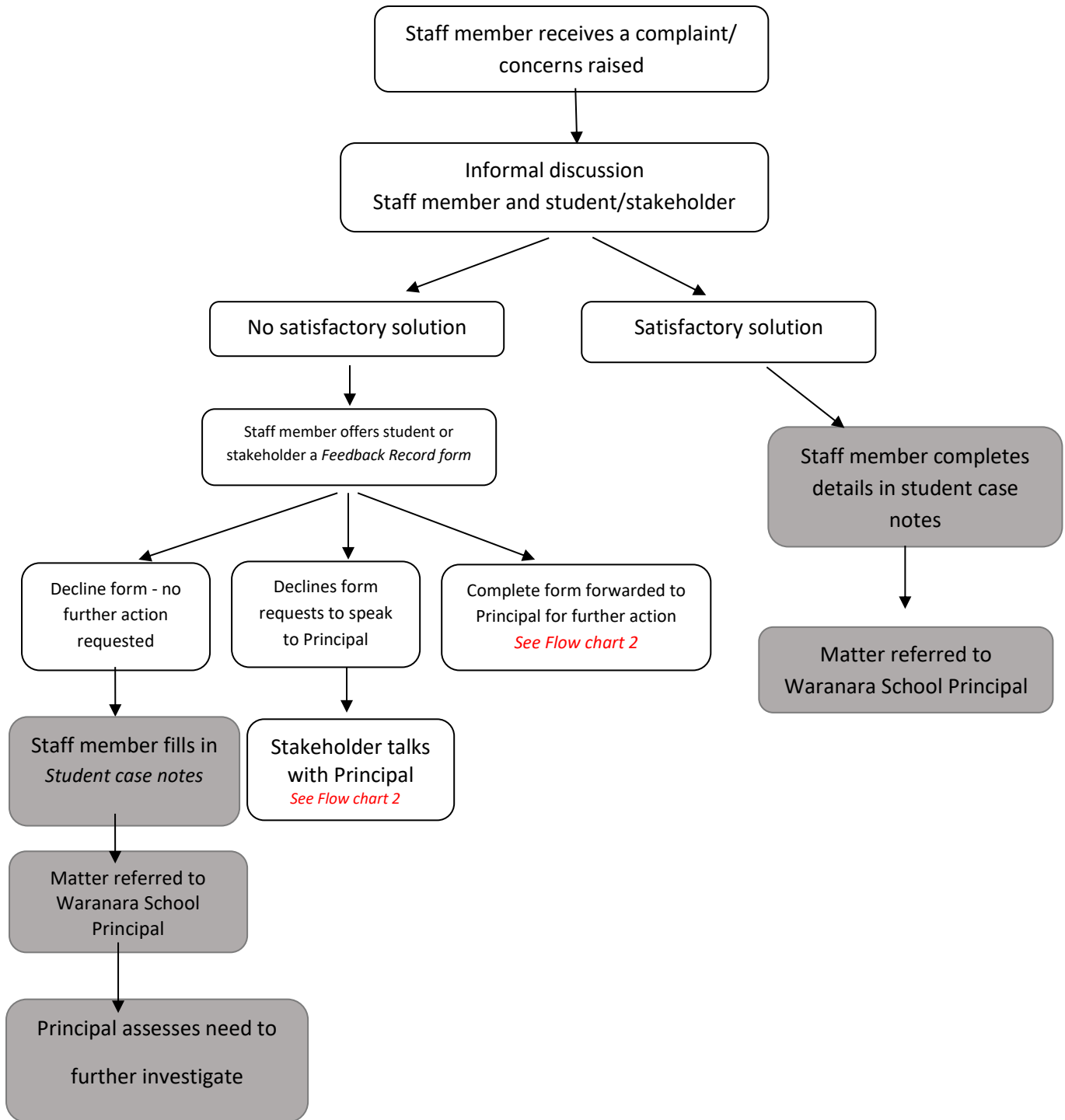
FORMS

- *Waranara School Feedback Form*

LEGISLATION

- NSW Community Services (Complaints, Reviews and Monitoring) Act 1993
- NSW Dept. of Community Services Service Agreement 2004-2005
Section 4.6: *"An effective complaints mechanism"* must be provided.
- NSW Department of Family and Community Services Youth Program Guidelines
(June 2004, section 3.14.2)

Waranara School Grievance/ Complaints Process for Students, Parents/Carers & Stakeholders
FLOW CHART 1



Waranara School Principal/ Waranara Management Committee Reponse to Complaints
FLOW CHART 2

