



In partnership with parents Strathalbyn Christian College aims to make known the Lordship of Jesus Christ through excellence in education to equip students for works of service ~ College Mission Statement

Rationale

This Policy affirms our commitment to healthy and positive relationships and to effectively resolve conflict when it occurs. Our intent is to ensure that all serious complaints and grievances are handled appropriately.

Scope

This Policy outlines the way the College will deal with disputes which may arise between any members of our College community, when the normal procedures for resolving conflict have not been successful.

The day to day management of the College is the responsibility of the Principal. The Geraldton Christian Community Schools Association (GCCSA) Board operates out of a Policy-governance framework and should only be contacted if the normal grievance channels have been exhausted.

Definitions

Grievance: A grievance may exist when a member of the College or wider community has a complaint against a person, or the College, or a group of persons within the College, concerning an action taken, a policy, a process, structures, etc. which for whatever reason has not resolved.

Conflict: A conflict can be said to exist where two parties are in opposition to each other over an issue and are unable to resolve it by themselves.

Mediation: Mediation is a process whereby the listening and speaking between parties in a grievance or conflict situation is facilitated by an independent, skilled person or panel.

Resolution: Resolution is a stage reached between two parties who, though once in conflict, have now agreed on a course of action that is perceived by both parties to be best for themselves and for the community of the College.

Dispute: A disagreement or argument. A dispute exists where all normal channels of complaint or conflict resolution have been exhausted.

References

1. Complaints Form (Appendix A)
2. How Do I Make a Complaint Flowchart (Appendix B)
3. Who Do I Talk To Chart

Related Policy and Procedures

1. Code of Conducts Policy (Staff, Students and Volunteers)
2. Bullying Policy

This Policy was last revised in February 2019 (v1.1)

This Policy was renamed Complaints Policy and revised June 2018 (v1.0)

Formerly Dispute Resolution Policy, adopted in May 2014, revised Feb 2017 (v1.2)

Next due for revision in Term 3, 2020

Policy

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The College seeks to apply a biblical foundation in its approach to dispute resolution. Principles such as those outlined in Matthew 18:15-17 and 1 Corinthians 6 remind us of our duty to not be in conflict while Matthew 7:5 also notes the importance of right perspective and bias. The following steps shall therefore apply in connection with questions, disputes or difficulties arising from conflict and relational breakdown.
- 1.2 College community members should seek to address issues or concerns with the person who is functionally responsible.
- 1.3 Community members should refer to the Who Do I Talk to Chart, which is available in the Staff and Family Handbooks, or by request from the Front Office.
- 1.4 Should a concern or issue not be addressed satisfactorily, the steps outlined in this Policy for making a complaint should be followed.

2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- 2.1 All complaints will be taken seriously and treated with the utmost confidentiality.
- 2.2 It is incumbent upon the complainant to maintain discretion so that the matter does not become a source of gossip, defamation or general disharmony.
- 2.3 A complainant has the right to peer support.

Procedure

1. HOW TO MAKE A COMPLAINT (see also Complaints Flowchart, Appendix B)

Any member of the College community or member of the general public who has a dispute or grievance should follow the steps outlined below:

- 1.1 A complaint, including as much detail as possible, may be made in the following manner:
 - a) Via an email (admin@scc.wa.edu.au) or letter;
 - b) By completing a Complaints Form (available to download from the College website, or request from the College Office) (see Appendix A)
 - c) By a member of staff taking down a complaint on a Complaints Form on behalf of a third party.
- 1.2 Those involved with a complaint will have the opportunity to present their point of view.
- 1.3 Complaints will be investigated according to the steps outlined below.
- 1.4 All complaints will be treated seriously and investigated.
- 1.5 A record of all complaints will be maintained (see Appendix C) and a report provided to the Geraldton Community Christian Schools Association (GCCSA) Board, on the number and nature of any complaints received since the previous report excluding identifying details. The record should contain the following:
 - i) Date when the issue was raised;
 - ii) Name of complainant;
 - iii) Brief statement of issue;
 - iv) Name of staff member/s who are the subject of a complaint;
 - v) Name of person/s responsible for investigating the complaint;
 - vi) Location of detailed file;
 - vii) Brief statement of outcome;
 - viii) Date of referral to Board for review, when applicable;
 - ix) Outcome of review by Board, when applicable.
- 1.6 A complaint may be made about the College as a whole, about a specific department in the College or about an individual member of staff.
- 1.7 Confidential files on all complaints should be maintained and kept together and cross-referenced with other files as necessary. The files should contain simple but clear notes of all conversations with complainant/s about any source of dissatisfaction. This applies to friendly chats and to telephone conversations, as misunderstandings easily arise. There should be a clear statement of what is concerning the complainant/s.
- 1.8 All complainants are requested to follow the steps outlined below (Note: Parents/guardians are asked not to write to the Board Chair without first having tried to solve the matter either informally or formally as outlined in the steps below. However, where a complaint is in relation to the Principal, a Complaint Form should be submitted directly to the Board Chair, GCCSA (see Appendix A).

2. STEPS

2.1 STAGE 1 – Informal Resolution

It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.

Complaints relating to students

- 2.1.1 Parents/guardians should first make contact with their child's teacher. In many cases the matter will be resolved to the parent/guardian's satisfaction. If the teacher cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for them to consult with a Deputy Principal or the Principal.
- 2.1.2 Complaints made directly to Deputy Principals or the Principal will usually be referred to the relevant teacher to first attempt informal resolution.
- 2.1.3 The parent/guardian and/or student will make a written record of all concerns and complaints according to the criteria described in Section 1 above.

If a student has a complaint against the College or a staff member, they should first speak to their parents/guardians. Then, on advice of parents/guardians, students should follow the same procedures listed in the informal and formal processes.

Complaints of a general nature:

- 2.1.4 Complainants should make a written record of all concerns and complaints according to the criteria described in Section 1 above.

Resolving Complaints:

- 2.1.5 The College will endeavour to resolve any informal complaints within ten (10) working days of them being raised, except where they are raised during school holidays, where the College will use all reasonable endeavours to resolve them as soon as possible after commencement of the new school term (usually within ten (10) working days).
- 2.1.6 Should the matter be resolved, action shall be taken by the College to prevent the situation being repeated. Such action may include: Improved Communication; Procedural Improvements; Professional Development, etc.
- 2.1.7 Should the matter not be resolved, or in the event that the teacher and the parents/guardians fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, then complainants will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage Two of this procedure.

2.2 STAGE 2 – Formal Resolution

- 2.2.1 If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then complainants should put their complaint in writing to the Principal, with the complaint being expressed clearly and courteously. Complainants should also identify how they wish their complaint to be resolved.
- 2.2.2 The written complaint is tabled with the Principal of the College who will act as a mediator or appoint a mediator (may be internal or external) to resolve the complaint within seven (7) days.
- 2.2.3 Within three (3) days of a complaint being received, the Principal will contact the complainant with a response (by telephone if possible), advising:
- a) the complaint has been received;
 - b) the action steps that will be taken.
- 2.2.3 In most cases, the Principal will meet or speak with the complainants concerned to discuss the matter. If possible a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- 2.2.4 The Principal will use reasonable endeavours to speak to or meet with complainants, within ten (10) working days of the formal complaint being received, except where the complaint is received in school holidays or within two (2) working days of their commencement where the Principal will use reasonable endeavours to speak or meet with complainants as soon as possible after the commencement of the new College term (usually within ten (10) working days).
- 2.2.5 It may be necessary for one of the Deputy Principals or teacher/s, as appropriate, to carry out further investigations.
- 2.2.6 The Principal will keep a written record of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- 2.2.7 Once the Principal is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made. Complainants will be informed of this decision in writing, giving reasons for the decision. The written decision should be provided no later than ten (10) working days after speaking or meeting with complainants to discuss the matter (pursuant to 2.2.4 above).
- 2.2.8 The College will keep a written record of all formal complaints, including records of meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint, and the College's decision (for complaints relating to students, records being kept for one year after the student leaves the College).
- 2.2.9 **If the complaint involves the Principal**, the complainant should address their complaint directly to the Geraldton Community Christian Schools Association (GCCSA) Board Chair, using the Complaints Form, including as much detail as possible (refer to Stage Three below).
- 2.2.10 Where the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcomes of the College's response to their formal complaint, the parents have the opportunity to have their complaint considered and reviewed by the Board Chair – see Stage 3 below.

2.3 STAGE 3 – Board Review

If complainants seek to invoke Stage Three following failure to reach an earlier resolution and where dissatisfied with the Principal's decision in respect of their formal complaint, the complainant may address the Board Chair, in writing, requesting that the decision relating to their complaint be reviewed.

- 2.3.1 Depending on the type of complaint made, the GCCSA Board Chair will:
- a) Contact the complainant within three (3) days to advise that the complaint has been received and to outline the process for dealing with the review.
 - b) Discuss the matter fully with the Principal and be provided with relevant documentation.
 - c) Ensure that the Principal is present at any meetings if a briefing is required from member/s of staff.
 - d) **If a complaint is made about the Principal**, the Board Chair will contact the complainant directly without speaking to the Principal first.

2.3.2 The Board Chair will use reasonable endeavours to speak to or meet with complainants, within ten (10) working days of the formal complaint being received, except where the complaint is received in school holidays or within two (2) working days of their commencement where the Board Chair will use reasonable endeavours to speak or meet with complainants as soon as possible after the commencement of the new College term (usually within ten (10) working days).

2.3.3 The Board Chair will keep a written record of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.

2.3.4 Once the Board Chair is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made. Complainants will be informed of this decision in writing, giving reasons for the decision. The written decision should be provided no later than ten (10) working days after speaking or meeting with complainants to discuss the matter.

2.3.5 The Board Chair will keep a written record of all formal complaints, including records of meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint, and the decision (for complaints relating to students, records being kept for one year after the student leaves the College).

Should the issue still remain unresolved

2.3.6 An independent mediator can be requested by the complainant, and will be appointed by the College if deemed necessary.

Should the issue still remain unresolved

2.3.7 The complainant should seek legal advice from an outside agency.

2.4 Complaints to the Director General (Department of Education)

- 2.4.1 Where complaints have been submitted to the Director General, the complainant may be referred to the school's complaints policy for resolution through the published procedures, if that process has not already been followed.
- 2.4.3 The Director General does not have a power to resolve a complaint or determine the outcome of a complaint made to a school. The Minister has a power under the Act to review a decision as to an individual student (s.223). The Minister may, but is not obliged to, conduct a review under this section. Where complaints have been submitted through the Minister, the complainant may be referred to the school's complaints policy for resolution through the published procedures, if that process has not already been followed.

3. CONFIDENTIALITY

- 3.1 All complaints will be treated in a confidential manner and with respect. Knowledge of a complaint will be limited to the Principal and those directly involved. The Chair of the GCCSA may also need to be informed.
- 3.2 The College's position is that complaints made by parents/guardians will not rebound adversely on their children and similarly that complaints raised by students will not rebound on them or on other students.
- 3.3 The College cannot entirely rule out the need to make third parties outside the school aware of the complaint and possibly also the identity of those involved. This would only be likely to happen where, for example, a child's safety was at risk or it became necessary to refer matters to the Police or other external authority. If information is passed to a third party, complainants will be informed, unless this is prevented by legal obligation.

4. ANONYMOUS COMPLAINTS

- 4.1 Anonymous complaints may be where there is no name or address supplied, or where the complainants say that they do not wish to be identified.
- 4.2 Complainants should be 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 Principal's discretion as to what action, if any, should be taken, depending on the nature of the complaint. Irrespective of whether any action is taken, anonymous complaints should be recorded in the complaints log for review, as, over time, they may contribute to an identifiable pattern.

Your Complaint

Please describe as clearly as possible what your complaint is about (attach additional sheets if necessary).

It may be helpful for us to know:

What happened? Where it happened? When it happened (include dates)?

Who did it (include names of individuals involved)?

How and when you found out about it?

Any other relevant details.

How would you like to see your complaint resolved?

What action would you like the College to take to resolve your complaint?

All complaints will be treated in a confidential manner and with respect. Knowledge of a complaint will be limited to the Principal and those directly involved. The Chair of the GCCSA may also need to be informed.

The College's position is that complaints made by parents/guardians will not rebound adversely on their children and similarly that complaints raised by students will not rebound on them or on other students.

Thank you for taking the time to explain your complaint to us. We will be in contact with you shortly to discuss the action/s being taken by the College.

This form is linked to the Complaints Policy, last revised in Feb 2019.
If any changes are made to this form, the Policy document should be amended at the same time.

APPENDIX B



Document Control and Tracking Register								
Document writing/ amendment/ updating				Review		Issue/ distribute		
Vers.	Author	Date	Purpose	Final Approval	Date	Publisher	Location	Date
1.0	F. Davidson, S. Fletcher, P. Fletcher, A. Hollander	20.06.2018	Revised Policy, added Procedures. Amended Appendix B, Added Appendix C	Senior Exec	20.06.2018	F. Davidson	Sentral	22.06.2018
1.1	G. Hirschhausen	26.02.2019	Revised Policy – expanded procedures	Principal & GCCSA Board Chair	28.02.2019	F. Davidson	Complispace	28.02.2019