



4.6 Student and Parent Grievance Policy

Introduction

Pittwater House values the feedback it receives from parents and the community. Responding to both affirmative and negative feedback demonstrates the School's commitment to open communication with the School Community and the community at large. Complaints about any aspect of the School's operations, service or personnel will be handled responsively, openly and in a timely manner, with the aim of resolving any complaint via an articulated process and respecting the confidential nature of such matters. Complaints are treated as constructive suggestions which may be used to improve standards and may prevent cause for further complaint.

Purpose

This policy is designed to:

- improve the level of stakeholder satisfaction with the School
- recognise, promote and protect stakeholders' rights, including the right to comment and complain
- provide an efficient, fair and accessible mechanism for resolving complaints in accordance with the principles of natural justice
- ensure that the complaint handling process is transparent and comprehensive.

Principles

Responsiveness. Complaints need to be resolved openly and responsibly. It is expected that all complaints will be acknowledged and resolved in a timely manner. The process and timeframes for resolution will vary depending on the nature, complexity and timing of the issue.

Fairness

The process needs to be fair to both the complainant and the person/s against whom the complaint is being made. All parties must be protected from victimisation, discrimination or retribution. The process is to be based on the principles of natural justice, including the complainant's right to:

- be heard
- have their complaint treated seriously
- be informed of the processes of complaints handling
- be informed of the School's decision and reasons for that decision

The person or section of the School about whom the complaint is made shall have the right to:

- be advised of the identity of the complainant and the complaint
- collect sufficient detail to enable them to gather information and prepare a response to the complaint
- have the opportunity to respond to the person investigating the complaint and have the response taken seriously
- be informed of the processes engaged in the complaints handling
- be informed of the decision and reason for the decision.

It is important that those handling complaints should be independent of the issue of the complaint. If a conflict of interest arises for the staff member involved in the receipt or management of a complaint, the Head of School will arrange for an independent staff member to continue with the process and hear the complaint. If the complaint involves a Head of School, they will inform the Principal. If the complaint involves the Principal, she will inform the Chairman of the School Council.

Confidentiality

To protect confidentiality and privacy, staff involved in handling complaints resolution must ensure that information is restricted only to those who genuinely need to know in order to deal with the complaint. Some information about the specific complaint may need to be disclosed to others during its resolution. The complainant needs to be informed of this.

Processes

It is important that the initial process of handling complaints is supportive and utilises positive conflict resolution skills. Each complaint should be treated on the information available and actions that are appropriate to the individual complaint. Anonymous complaints will not be recognised or dealt with under this policy.

Procedures for Raising a Concern or Making a Complaint

Pittwater House School acknowledges that concerns and issues exist that may be resolved informally without the need to follow a formal complaints process. In such cases complainants are encouraged initially to raise issues or concerns informally with the relevant person at the time of the issue arising. Discussing the issue or concern immediately and face-to-face may clarify the situation and resolve any misunderstandings satisfactorily. The process for raising complaints is set out below:

Outline of Complaint Procedures

- Any complaint should be first raised informally with the person concerned.
- If the matter is not resolved then complainants should approach their Form Teachers or the School Counsellors.
- In the event that this does not resolve the issue, the complainant should then contact the relevant Senior Staff member, in the case of Academic Matters then the Faculty Coordinator, co-curricular matters with the Coordinator of Creative Arts (for performing arts matters) or the Heads of Co-curricular (for all sporting & co-curricular matters).
- If there is still a concern then the person making the complaint should approach the Head of School for pastoral matters or the Deputy Principal for Academic matters.
- If the complaint is against the Principal then the complaint should be put in writing and addressed to the Chair of the Council.

Complaints received by Members of the School Council must be referred to the Chair, who will discuss the matter/s with the Principal. Positive resolution of a complaint should aim to:

- seek resolution at the level at which the complaint is made
- gain agreement of the parties
- consider all relevant information and views of all parties
- consider the School's policies

The management of complaints resolution needs to reflect the following:

- Complainants should be told the process for complaint resolution and an indication of how long it will take to deal with a complaint
- Complainants should be kept informed of progress on resolving the complaint where relevant
- It is expected that written complaints will be acknowledged within 7 days of receipt. The proposed timeframe required to resolve the complaint should be indicated to the complainant as early as possible in the process and may vary according to the nature, complexity or timing of the complaint.

International Student Complaints against Planned Actions (Appeals)

General complaints should be first raised informally with the International Student Coordinator as per the **Outline of Complaint Procedures**.

Where a complaint regards a planned action of the school including but not limited to cancellation of enrolment due to a notice of Intention to Report due to Unsatisfactory Attendance or a notice of Intention to Report due to Unsatisfactory Course Progress:

- the school commits to maintain the enrolment whilst the complaint is considered.
- the complaint must be lodged within the timeframe for appeal which will be detailed in the original notice or letter advising of the schools planned action against which the complaint is being made.

Where the outcome of a complaint against planned action is unsatisfactory to the complainant, an appeal may be presented to the Overseas Students Ombudsman. Any costs associated will be the responsibility of Pittwater House.

This policy does not take away the complainant's rights to take further action under Australia's consumer protection laws.

Record Keeping

All complaints which cannot be resolved informally will be confidentially recorded by the staff member handling the complaint and kept on the relevant file/s. Details should include:

- The nature of the complaint
- Dates and names of parties concerned
- Staff members involved in handling the complaint
- Action taken and outcomes