



Complaints Handling Policy and Procedures

Policy Statement

Children's safety, health and wellbeing is our key priority, and we welcome the input of families into all aspects of our School's operation, including any complaints they may have.

We take complaints seriously and manage them in a confidential, timely, transparent and meaningful way. We do this by:

- maintaining a child focus.
- acknowledging that the common goal is to achieve an outcome acceptable to all parties.
- acting in good faith and in a calm and courteous manner.
- showing respect and understanding of each other's point of view and value difference.
- recognising that all parties have rights and responsibilities which must be balanced.
- handling complaints objectively.
- ensuring that complainants do not suffer any reprisals from making a complaint, and
- viewing complaints as a mechanism to support the continuous improvement of the School.

Purpose and scope

This procedure applies to Highfields School in handling complaints made in respect of services provided by the School or against staff members, which includes employees, contractors and volunteers.

This procedure does not extend to personal grievances between parents, guardians or other members of the School community.

Whistleblowing complaints

This procedure does not extend to complaints which are whistleblowing disclosures. The procedure for processing whistleblowing complaints is dealt with in the School's whistleblowing policy.

In summary a whistleblowing disclosure is a disclosure which:

- is made by a Board Member, staff member, a person who supplies goods or services to the School, including a volunteer, an employer of a supplier or a relative of any of these people;
- involves alleged misconduct, an improper state of affairs or circumstances, or illegal activity, and
- is made to the Principal, Office Manager, or Chairman of the School Board who the School has authorised to collect such disclosures.

Key Legislation

NSW Ombudsman Act 1974

Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010: Sections 172, 174,

Education and Care Services National Regulations: Regulations 143B, 168 - 173, 176

Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 (NSW)

Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)

Privacy Regulation 2013

Early Childhood Standards and Regulations

NQS

QA7	7.1	Governance supports the operation of a quality service.
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National Regulations

Regs	168	Education and care service must have policies and procedures
	170	Policies and procedures to be followed
	171	Policies and procedures to be kept available
	172	Notification of change to policy and procedures
	173	Prescribed information to be displayed – education and care service
	176(2)(b)	Time to notify certain information to Regulatory Authority

Related policies

Complaints about reportable conduct will be addressed in accordance with the School's Child Protection Policy.

Complaints regarding a grievance between staff members about work matters, including work relationships and decisions made by other staff members which impact on their work, are addressed in accordance with the School's Staff Grievance Procedure.

Complaints regarding unlawful discrimination, harassment or bullying between staff are generally addressed in accordance with the School's Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying Statement.

Confidentiality

All parties involved in complaints handling are required to maintain appropriate confidentiality, including in relation to handling and storing records.

Complaints

A complaint or grievance is an expression of dissatisfaction made to the School about an educational and/or operational matter relating to services provided by the School or the behaviour or decisions of a staff member, contractor or volunteer, including misconduct.

If a parent/carer or child has a concern about the conduct of a staff member, they should raise their concern with the School in accordance with section 1 below.

If a complaint concerns the behaviour of a staff member that may constitute reportable conduct, the matter will be addressed in accordance with the School's Child Protection Policy. Please refer to the School's Child Protection Policy for information about reportable conduct. A complaint about a reportable conduct matter may be current or historical. Timeframes for investigation of complaints relating to reportable conduct are dependent on the individual matter and may be over an extended period of time, particularly in the case of a historical allegation. The School is bound by privacy or other confidentiality requirements when conducting investigations of reportable conduct allegations, which may limit the information that can be shared with the complainant regarding the outcome of an investigation.

Complainants are not required to assess whether their concern meets the threshold of reportable conduct before making a complaint. Any concern about a child's wellbeing or the conduct of an employee, volunteer, contractor or member of the School community may be reported under this policy.

If a complaint concerns sexualised behaviour involving children, the matter will be addressed under the Child Protection Policy. Any concern about a child's wellbeing may be reported under this policy.

Complaints may be made by a child or parent/guardian.

The School will seek to resolve complaints informally where possible but acknowledges that in some cases, a person may wish to make a formal complaint.

Raising a Complaint

1. The complainant

Informal complaints may be raised by a complainant directly with the person involved. However, if the complainant does not feel comfortable doing so or the matter is one where it may not be appropriate to do so, a complaint can be made to the Principal. Any formal complaint about the conduct of a staff member should be raised directly with the Principal in the first instance.

Should the matter not be resolved through informal processes, the complainant may raise the matter formally with the School. A formal complaint can be made in writing to the Principal, via email deborahcook@highfields.nsw.edu.au

Where a person wishes to make a formal complaint concerning the Principal the complaint should be made in writing to the Chairman of the Board, via email chairman@highfields.nsw.edu.au In this situation, the references in this policy relating to the role of the Principal should be read as references to the Chairman.

2. The School

The Principal will generally acknowledge receipt of a formal complaint in writing as soon as practicable.

Handling complaints

1. Assessing a complaint

The Principal will generally assess the complaint and determine:

- whether the complaint is one to be addressed under this policy or is a staff grievance or reportable conduct matter which will be dealt with by the relevant policies; and
- the priority of the complaint in accordance with the urgency and/or seriousness of the matter raised; and
- whether the School may be required to report the matter to the Ombudsman, Police, Department of Communities and Justice or Regulatory Authority within 24 hours of the complaint having been made should the complaint relate to a serious incident, possible unlawful conduct or other reportable matters.

2. Managing a formal complaint

The Principal will generally manage a formal complaint by:

- a) advising the complainant of the likely steps that will be undertaken by the School in relation to the complaint, including the requirement to maintain complete confidentiality at all times;
- b) if appropriate, advising the relevant parties of the complaint at the appropriate time and providing them with an opportunity to respond;
- c) collecting any additional information the School considers necessary to assess the complaint;
- d) making a decision about how the complaint will be resolved (“resolution decision”); and
- e) advising the complainant in writing, and any other relevant parties as appropriate, of the resolution decision of the Principal and if appropriate, any proposed action to be taken.

There may be circumstances where some of the steps outlined above are not appropriate and the School will determine, on a case by case basis the most appropriate method of handling the complaint.

A complainant and the relevant parties that the complaint is about may choose to have an appropriate support person present at any meeting with representatives of the School about the complaint. However, the School maintains the right to determine whether the person’s preferred support person is appropriate and may not approve the attendance of a support person where they are determined by the School to be inappropriate.

The goal of the School is to satisfactorily resolve a complaint, however if a complaint is not resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant, it can be referred to the Chairman of the School Board via email chairman@highfields.nsw.edu.au If the complainant remains unsatisfied, they may contact the NSW Ombudsman or if the complaint relates to the preSchool, the Regulatory Authority in NSW.

Early Childhood Education Directorate, NSW Department of Education

Website: education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education

Email: ececd@det.nsw.edu.au

Phone: 1800 619 113

Contact

If you have any queries about this procedure, you should contact the Principal for advice.

References and Resources

Sample Complaints Policy and Procedure AISNSW July 2024. Copyright of this document is owned by The Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales Limited (AISNSW). AISNSW member Schools are licensed to copy and amend this document for use in the School.

Sample Complaints Policy. Community Early Learning Australia (CELA) March 2024

The School's policies which have been made from time to time are made pursuant to the requirements set out in section 47 of the *Education Act* and of the NESA for the registration of the School.

Reviewed

March 2025