



HANDLING COMPLAINTS

PURPOSE

At Walford Anglican School for Girls we are dedicated to creating a safe and nurturing environment that prioritises the safety and wellbeing of all individuals. Parents are key partners in their daughter's journey, actively participating in the care and growth of each student and working together with the School to ensure the best outcome for their child.

This policy describes the practices of Walford Anglican School for Girls for addressing parent complaints respectfully, fairly, in a non-adversarial manner, expeditiously and with sensitivity to all concerned.

DEFINITIONS

Throughout this document, the term 'parent' has been used to refer to both parents and caregivers, which includes individuals who have assumed responsibility for the role of primary caregiver for a child or young person, such as guardians, grandparents, or other family members.

For the purpose of this policy, a complaint or grievance is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived situation, outcome or decision. The dissatisfaction may be based on the perception that the School has done something wrong, failed to do something it should have, or acted unfairly or inappropriately. It may be about the school as a whole, about a specific department within the school or about an individual.

PRINCIPLES

Once a complaint is raised, the School will endeavour to investigate and resolve it as quickly as possible, through direct communication/discussion by and between the parties themselves, to ensure they do not become ongoing disputes.

The following principles underpin Walford's handling of parent complaints:

- The School values feedback and is open to hearing the concerns of parents.
- Complaints are received in a positive manner.
- The emphasis is on early intervention, effective management and resolution, with the School supporting complainants wherever possible and as soon as is practicable after a matter becomes of concern, to seek to resolve the complaint in an informal and amicable manner.
- The health, safety and wellbeing of all members of the School community remains the highest priority.
- The School supports the right of every member of the School to have their complaint lodged, listened to, addressed fairly and dealt with expeditiously.
- The School is committed to being as clear as possible with the complainant about what will and will not be treated in confidence.
- Complaints are, wherever possible, resolved at the school level, and by the staff member closest to the situation.
- Records of complaints are maintained and securely filed.
- Legislative obligations are met (e.g. child protection laws, mandatory reporting, privacy, anti-discrimination and vilification laws, and Family Court Orders).

PROCEDURES

Lodging a complaint

While a complaint is being investigated, it is expected that all parties will behave in a manner consistent with the School's Codes of Behaviour and values. As outlined in the Parent Code of Behaviour (Policy 10.2), parents are expected to support the educational ethos and values of the School, behave respectfully towards members of our community, communicate and use technology and social media appropriately, be a responsible visitor and participant, and raise genuine grievances in an appropriate, constructive and respectful way.

Every reasonable effort will be made by the School and its representatives to ensure that a person who lodges a complaint or anyone dealing with or involved in the complaint will not be treated unfairly, victimised, coerced or intimidated.

Communication and resolution processes will be based on the parties acting in good faith, exercising good judgment, being open and honest and focusing on the issue and not the person/s.

Each complaint is to be dealt with on its particular circumstances and merits and any settlements reached or determinations made through the resolution process will not necessarily constitute any binding precedent for future or similar cases.

In responding to a complaint, informally or formally, every reasonable effort shall be made to ensure that natural justice and procedural fairness are afforded to all parties. This means that:

- All parties will be treated with respect and to be heard.
- All parties should participate fully in the resolution process to achieve an outcome that is realistic and reasonable.
- A person who is the subject of the complaint shall be informed of the substance thereof and given a full opportunity to present their perspective.
- All parties have the right to seek advice and support.
- Investigations and proceedings will be conducted fairly, thoroughly and without bias or undue delay.
- Parties should provide all relevant, material, complete and factual information, documents or other evidence relating to the complaint.
- Depending on the complaint, the School may inform their insurance company of the issue, as the insurer may have requirements about the management of the complaint.

Informal resolution of complaints wherever possible

Many complaints may be minor in nature or readily resolved, and often arise from genuine misunderstandings and/or issues relating to communication. Often, these can be satisfactorily resolved informally.

Complainants are encouraged to seek local and informal resolutions in the first instance.

- Complaints relating to academic matters should be directed to the teacher in the first instance, followed by the Learning Leader, and then the Director of Learning and Teaching.
- Complaints relating to pastoral matters should be directed to the classroom teacher (ELC and Junior School) or Mentor teacher (Middle and Senior School) in the first instance, followed by the Head of House, and then the Head of School.
- Complaints about finances, facilities or operations should be directed to the person responsible for that area.

Formal and serious complaints

Formal procedures for the resolution of complaints should only be invoked when a matter is of a very serious nature and/or cannot be resolved by the parties themselves through informal means. In such instances, the complainant may also seek advice or clarification about the appropriate person/s in the School to whom the concern or complaint might best be directed.

Staff who can receive formal and serious complaints are:

- Head of Boarding
- Head of Sport and Coaching
- Head of School
- Director of Learning and Teaching
- Director of Marketing and Community Engagement
- Director of Finance and Corporate Services
- Principal

As soon as practicable after a formal written complaint has been lodged, a process will be put in place by the School to investigate the complaint.

The investigative process in relation to a formal complaint will include but not necessarily be limited to gathering relevant and material information relating to the complaint, and meetings convened of the parties to discuss the complaint and to seek a resolution.

If a resolution cannot be found, a determination will be made by the School, based on thorough investigation, as to whether or not to uphold the complaint.

Whether the complaint is substantiated, the evidence is inconclusive, or if the complaint is found not to be substantiated, all parties will be formally advised accordingly. The School will also communicate any follow up

actions, mediation or counselling it deems appropriate.

Referral of a complaint to the Council of Governors

As a general rule, the Chair of the Council of Governors and members of the Council of Governors are not directly involved in the first instance with the receipt, investigation or resolution of a serious complaint other than grievances within the School Council itself.

In instances where a complaint is about the Principal a person may, if they feel the matter cannot otherwise be resolved or feels it is appropriate to do so, lodge a formal complaint with the Chair of the Council of Governors. In turn, and in consultation with the complainant, the Chair will expeditiously take all reasonable steps to have the complaint fully investigated and to facilitate a resolution.

Referral of a complaint to an external authority

Where a serious complaint is not or cannot be resolved within the School, the parties may seek assistance from outside professional agencies to judicial bodies in order that a further attempt can be made to resolve the matter.

The Association of Independent Schools (AISSA) will not act as a mediator between parents and schools. Neither the Minister for Education and Child Development nor the Department for Education and Child Development has any power to directly intervene in any complaints relating to the operations of Walford.

Complaint confidentiality

The School will treat each parent complaint with respect, sensitivity and discretion. In handling complaints, the School will distinguish between situations where a legal obligation of confidentiality arises and cases where it does not. Any staff member involved in the investigation will be instructed very clearly not to discuss the matter with any other people, including, but not limited to, other staff, students or parents.

The School cannot guarantee that communications or documents will be kept confidential. While it may be possible to investigate a complaint without naming individuals, the source of the complaint may be obvious even if no names are given. Often it is not possible to keep the information only with the complainant and the staff member/s who receives the complaint to reach resolution.

Depending on the nature of the complaint and on the circumstances, it may be impractical to undertake an investigation without disclosing the identity of the complainant, the staff member(s) and/or the student concerned. The School reserves its right to disclose details of the matter to other persons who in its opinion need to know them to facilitate the resolution of the complaint. Generally, the details of the complaint will be disclosed only to people who need to know them, either because they are dealing with the complaint, or are advising about how it should be handled, or are providing information such as witness statements.

If a parent chooses to make a complaint without disclosing their identity, this will limit the options for proper and thorough investigation and resolution. It also raises issues in relation to procedural fairness for those who have a complaint made about them as they have a right to know the particulars of the complaint and to respond. The School therefore cannot guarantee that anonymous complaints can or will be dealt with. Complainants are always encouraged to identify themselves.

There may be occasions where anonymous complaints are received. There are limitations to the extent that an anonymous complaint can be investigated. The Principal will determine how to manage these complaints on a case-by-case basis.

Mandatory reporting

Where complaints are made in circumstances where an alleged crime may have been committed or the matter falls under the Responding to Risks of Harm, Abuse and Neglect provisions, the Police or similar outside agencies (e.g. Child Abuse Report Line - CARLS) will be contacted and formally advised.

Legal obligations relating to child abuse may limit Walford's ability to undertake a comprehensive investigation. This particularly applies to the mandatory reporting requirements outlined in the [Children and Young People \(Safety\) Act 2017 \(SA\)](#). South Australia Police (SAPOL) involvement in some investigations may also limit the nature and scope of the School's investigation. In such cases, the School will seek guidance from SAPOL as to what can or cannot be done while the police are involved in the matter.

Withdrawal of a complaint

A parent may withdraw a complaint at any stage of the resolution process. If a complaint is withdrawn, the matter will be deemed to be closed, unless the School, at its discretion and in all the circumstances, wishes to continue to

address a matter raised.

Record keeping by the School

It should be noted that documents that may be created during the course of investigations and handling a complaint might have to be produced in legal proceedings. It is important that this be borne in mind at all times.

The record of the complaint should contain clear and accurate notes of conversations with parents, students and staff, including dates, statements made by the complainant and those taken in investigations and other relevant files and outcomes.

Records will be very useful if further disputation occurs or in the case of future legal action. An appropriate records management system be established which protects the privacy of the individual(s) concerned and which contains full details of the complaint and subsequent actions taken to resolve the matter.

Review and distribution of this policy

Regular reviews of complaint handling procedures are undertaken to ensure the effectiveness and responsiveness of School policy and procedure.

This policy will be made available to all staff and parents of the School via the Parent Portal and the School's policies platform.

Legislative context

[Children and Young People \(Safety\) Act 2017 \(SA\)](#)

[Privacy Act 1988 \(Cth\)](#)

[Education and Children's Services Act 2019 \(SA\)](#)

[Equal Opportunity Act 1984 \(SA\)](#)

[State Government Funding Deed](#)

Date Issued:	January 2016
Last Reviewed:	April 2024
Next Review:	April 2025
Responsibility:	Principal
Policy Number:	4.8