

Complaints, Grievances & Concerns Policy

April 2016



Complaints, Grievances & Concerns Policy 2016

Policy Statement

1.1 Purpose of a Complaints, Grievances & Concerns Procedure

At Alphington Grammar School we are committed to providing a safe and supportive work and learning environment for all employees and students. We acknowledge that employees, students and parents, or people from the wider community, can sometimes feel aggrieved about something that is happening at the school which appears to be discriminatory, is unfair, unjust or unreasonable, constitute harassment or cause concern.

An employee, student, parent or community member can have a complaint about any decision, behaviour, act or omission (whether by the Principal, members of the leadership team or other staff/students or parents) that they feel is discriminatory or unreasonable.

Sometimes the aggrieved person can address the issue by raising the complaint directly with the person involved with the issue. However, that is not always possible, and sometimes several attempts at local or face-to-face resolution have been attempted or have taken place with little success. Whilst most issues can be resolved through direct discussion with the parties involved, there may be instances in which to take up the issue with the other person on a face-to-face basis is not possible.

In line with our stated school values, we aim to treat all persons within the school or wider community with **respect** and in a manner mindful of the **diverse** nature of our school. We acknowledge our overarching **responsibility** in responding to all matters concerning complaints, grievances and concerns with **integrity**, and **we endeavour** to provide a satisfactory outcome within the scope of these guidelines. This Policy is freely available on the school's website and intranet.



Alphington Grammar School endorses the guiding principles of the National Safe Schools Framework which states that Australian schools should:

- *Affirm the rights of all members of the school community to feel safe and be safe at school.*
- *Acknowledge that being safe and supported at school is essential for student wellbeing and effective learning.*
- *Accept responsibility for developing and sustaining safe and supportive learning and teaching communities that also fulfill the school's child protection responsibilities.*
- *Encourage the active participation of all school community members in developing and maintaining a safe school community where diversity is valued.*

- Actively support young people to develop understanding and skills to keep themselves and others safe.
- Commit to developing a safe school community through a whole-school and evidence-based approach.

The school recognises that these principles are especially important when dealing with all aspects of complaint handling as harmonious relationships underpin successful schooling.

1.2 Definitions and Examples of Complaints, Grievances & Concerns covered by this procedure include:

- issues related to learning and teaching
- issues related to student discipline procedures
- damage/loss of personal property
- bullying and harassment

For the purposes of the policy:

- A **'concern'** is an issue of interest (because of its importance and effect) which is raised informally in order to improve or change a situation. For example:

I believe that the school's physical education policy and program is inadequate. I don't think that it caters for students who have well-developed skills and who need to be involved in competitive sport. I think the school should review its policy in this area.

- A **'complaint'** is an expression of **grievance** or resentment where the complainant is seeking redress or justice. For example:

My daughter has been left out of the school's netball team for the third time in a row. She is an accomplished netballer and deserves to be included.

- Throughout this policy the term 'complaint' is used in the understanding that 'grievances' and 'concerns' are more likely to be addressed without the need for a formal complaint. The school recognises that, in particular, a grievance is more likely to be dealt with under the same procedure as a 'complaint'.

1.3 In conjunction with this Complaints, Grievances & Concerns procedure, note should be taken of relevant legislation, guidelines, *policies* and *procedures* pertinent to the issue, including for instance:

- Work Health and Safety issues.
- Child Protection issues, e.g.: Child Safe Policy.
- AGS Staff Code of Conduct.
- AGS Enrolment Policy and Procedures.
- AGS Suspension & Exclusion Policy.
- AGS Discipline Policy.
- AGS Staff Relations Policy (Bullying & Harassment).
- AGS Privacy Policy.
- AGS Enterprise Agreement (October 2015).

The outcome of complaint investigations may be used to inform the policies of the school and risk management strategies.

1.4 Legal obligations

The school recognises that some complaints may not be resolved within the confines of the school and that any complainant is entitled to seek further redress as outlined below.

Ombudsman Act 1973 (Vic)

The Victorian Ombudsman has issued Fact Sheet No 2 which states "*There is now an expectation in both public and private sectors that organisations have established complaint –handling procedures. If you wish to make a complaint, you should first direct this to the organisation to give them the opportunity to address your concerns*".

Pathways for pursuing a complaint outside the confines of the school include:

The Victorian Registration & Qualifications Authority (VRQA): The Education Training and Reform ACT Regulations - Part 8 - breach of the principles, requires the VRQA to investigate complaints from members of the public alleging a breach by a registered school or a person, body or school registered under Division 3 or 4 of Part 4.3 of the ETR Act, of the principles in s1.2.1 (a), (c), (e) or (f) of the ETR Act.

The Australian Health Practitioner Regulatory Authority (AHPRA): If your concern is with Health centre staff.

Independent Schools Victoria (ISV)

The Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT):

Advice from the VIT website is as follows:

In many cases, concerns you have about a teacher can be resolved appropriately by discussing them with the teacher's employer. Before you lodge a complaint with us, we encourage you to contact and speak with the:

- *Principal.*
- *The governing body of the school.*

We can only deal with complaints that relate to allegations of:

- *Misconduct.*
- *Serious misconduct.*
- *Serious incompetence.*
- *A teacher's mental and physical ability to teach.*

If your complaint relates to one or more of these areas, then you may lodge a complaint with us about a registered teacher.

1.4 Making a Complaint, or expressing a Grievance or Concern

Some complaints, because of the seriousness of their nature, should be referred immediately to the Principal – e.g. complaints about behaviour which places others at risk of serious harm. All issues to do with the abuse of children should trigger the procedures outlined in the **Child Safe Policy**.

Parents are advised *not* to approach the children of other families with a school related complaint. This is often a sensitive area and in order to protect all the parties it is advisable to work through the relevant teacher or members of the school leadership team.

1.4.1 Before making a formal complaint.

If a problem or concern that arises within a school, cannot be resolved with the person involved with the issue, then it would normally be raised with an appropriate staff member with a view to discussing the issue and seeking resolution of such problems or concerns.

1.4.2 Making a formal complaint

If the above process of raising the concern, obtaining the facts, and obtaining resolution is not producing a satisfactory outcome, the following procedure can be used.

The purpose of this procedure is to offer a process by which employees/students/parents/community members can have complaints dealt with. For example, if you feel that you are being harassed or discriminated against, this complaints handling procedure is available to you so your concerns can be dealt with in an appropriate manner.

All persons submitting a complaint are welcome to use the Complaint Form in Appendix 1.

Who may use this procedure?

- All employees.
- Students within the school.
- Parents/caregivers of students at the school.
- Members of the wider community.

Key elements of our complaints handling policy

2.1 Impartiality and procedural fairness

If you make a complaint, it will be investigated in a fair and impartial manner. No judgements or assumptions will be made, and no action will be taken until the investigation is complete. If a complaint is made against you, your rights will be protected and you will be given an opportunity to tell your side of the story. All persons involved will be kept fully informed of the details as appropriate. If the school obtains legal advice in connection with a complaint however, the advice is privileged.

2.2 Confidentiality

Where possible, a complaint made under this procedure will remain confidential. The only people who will have access to information about the complaint will be the person making the complaint, the person to whom the complaint is made, the person investigating and any third party who may be involved. The person about whom the complaint is made also has a right to be informed. Where a complainant asks to remain anonymous, the investigating officer will decide whether that request can be conceded to and whether it is practical to do so.

Depending on the nature of the complaint however the school reserves the right to disclose details of the matter to any other persons who, in our opinion, need to know, in order to facilitate the resolution of the complaint.

2.3 No victimisation

You can also rest assured that if you make a complaint you will not suffer in any way as a consequence. The School will make every effort to see that a person who makes a complaint is not victimised in any way.

2.4 Vexatious or malicious complaints

There is an underlying assumption that complaints are made in good faith (and with good will) and with an intention for resolution as opposed to retribution.

Where the investigating officer believes the complaint is malicious, vexatious, frivolous or lacks substance, he or she may deem not to investigate or proceed but will document the complaint and inform the complainant.

2.5 Timeliness

Each complaint will be finalised within as short a period of time as possible. Complainants will be advised if the matter cannot be finalised within one month.

2.6 Subpoenas, Court Orders (see Legal Obligations 1.4 above)

The school must comply with the law and respond to any subpoenas issued.

The school must be informed of any court orders pertaining to a child and undertakes to do its best to support those court orders. However, the school is not obliged to enforce court orders to the detriment of the safety of staff and other students. (for example if an attempt is made to remove a child from the school and this is in breach of an order, all reasonable efforts will be made to prevent this including the initiation of Lockdown procedure according to the DISPLAN. The school will call police to enforce a current order.)

2.7 Access and Transparency

The school will ensure that this policy is accessible to the public and that the policy is enforced in a clear and consistent manner.

2.8 Accountability

The school acknowledges the need to ensure that the complaint handling procedures are open to review and scrutiny by all stakeholders.

2.9 Consideration for persons of Aboriginal Background, Culturally, Family Diverse or Linguistically Diverse Background, or with a Disability

The school respects the diversity of the school and wider community and understands that a range of issues may affect a complainant which means the school needs to make allowances for or provide assistance with the process as set out in this policy. For example, an interpreter may be required to ensure that facts are accurate and the exchange of information is fairly represented. The school will endeavour to honour due diligence in this area and make every effort to accommodate diverse needs to ensure equality of process.

What to do if you have a Complaint, Grievance or Concern

3.1 Approach the person involved

In many situations, the most appropriate thing to do first is to tell the person who is the cause of the complaint how you feel. If the complaint is about their behaviour, tell them that it is offensive/hurtful/not acceptable. If it is about a work decision, tell them why you think it is discriminatory, harassment, unfair, unjust or unreasonable. Telling the person will give them a chance to stop or change what they are doing or explain what they had decided and why. In this way many situations can be resolved before they become formal complaints.

If the complaint is able to be resolved immediately, and no further action is deemed necessary, the person receiving the complaint will document it appropriately in their personal file for future reference.

3.2 Contact the School

Where you feel you cannot approach the person directly or you are not happy with their response or reaction, then you can explain the matter to the appropriate person at the school. An inquiry at the school reception may be the first point of contact for people with complaints. You do not have to tell the front office staff the nature of your complaint if you do not wish to, but any information you do give will assist them in directing your complaint to the right person.

You will be advised as to the person designated to deal with the nature of the complaint. This person may be a classroom or subject teacher, Faculty Head, Head of House, the Assistant Principal or Principal. The designated person will advise you about what your options are and what will happen if you make a formal complaint.

All staff are authorised to receive complaints in the initial stage and act as a 'designated person'. Once the complaint becomes a formal complaint it will be passed on to the relevant Head of House, the Assistant Principal or the Principal who will then be deemed the Investigating Officer. Any Investigating Officer may co-opt other staff to assist in any part of the process.

Occasionally some parents contact the School Council directly with a matter of concern. The School Council is not involved in the day to day running of the school and will refer any complaints back to the Principal or Senior Management Team (SMT).

3.3 Contact the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT), The Victorian Registration & Qualifications Authority (VRQA), The Australian Health Practitioner Regulatory Authority (AHPRA); Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT), Independent Schools Victoria (ISV).

Where you feel you cannot approach the person directly or you are not happy with their response or reaction, and you have a good reason not to raise the issue either with the school designated person or the school Principal, then you can contact the VIT or VRQA or any relevant other statutory body. An officer will usually discuss raising your concerns at the school level with you. They can also advise you about your options. These bodies can also assist with advice if you feel the matter with the school has not been resolved.

What happens next?

4.1 Once you have made the complaint to the school the dedicated person will then consider whether there are any reasons why he/she should proceed to deal with the complaint. For example, the person you complained about may be a personal friend. If there is such a reason which indicates it is inappropriate for the designated person to deal with your complaint, it will, with your consent, be referred to another appropriate person.

4.2 The designated person (see item 10) will then make a report to the relevant Head of House or member of SMT. Together they will decide the most suitable personnel to be involved in the process. They will then interview you or organise another appropriate person to interview you. During this interview a number of things will be explained to you, such as what will happen if the complaint is found to be supported by the evidence, or if it is found to not be supported by the evidence. You will also be told where you can go for assistance if you are not happy with the way the school is dealing with the complaint. The designated person will then take a written record of the complaint.

4.3 The designated person will then speak to the person about whom the complaint is made to hear their side of the story. Any witnesses will also be interviewed. These interviews will be conducted separately and impartially. Written reports about the complaint may be requested. The importance of confidentiality will be stressed to all parties and they will be warned of the consequences if there is a breach of confidentiality (e.g. possible defamation action, initiation of a complaint for harassment etc.).

4.4 The designated person will then tell you what the other people said and discuss what should be done to sort out the matter. You should tell the person what action you would like taken, e.g. a written apology from the person, a written warning, etc. This allows the designated person to understand, from your perspective, what you believe you need from the process. It will not dictate the remedy that might ultimately apply.

Review

If the complaint remains unresolved it will be reviewed by either the Principal or another member of SMT. They will make a final decision as to the outcome of the complaint.

Note that this review step will only be possible if the Principal or other member of the SMT has not been acting as the designated person.

Possible outcomes

6.1 If the complaint is upheld or sustained, the following are possible outcomes depending on the nature of the complaint:

- An agreement between the parties.
- A verbal apology.
- A written apology.
- Suspension.
- Expulsion.

Where staff members are the subject of a complaint, action taken may be as stated in the Staff Relations Policy. Where students are the subject of a complaint, action taken may be as stated in the relevant student discipline and pastoral care policies.

6.2 If a complaint is not upheld or not substantiated (e.g. there is insufficient evidence) but some issues come out of the investigation that are required to be addressed then, possible outcomes include:

- Relevant training for employees and/or students; and/or;
- Monitoring of the behaviour of employees and/or students.
- Counselling for the aggrieved person.
- Mediation at the local level.

6.3 If the complaint is proved not to have happened at all, or if there is evidence that the complaint was made with the main purpose or intent of causing distress to the other named as the source of the grievance, the following are possible outcomes:

- Counselling for the person who made the complaint.
- A written apology from the person who made the complaint.
- An official warning.
- Referral for disciplinary action for students and staff.

The relevant designated person will make sure that whatever outcome is decided upon actually happens. The designated person or the school Principal (unless they are the object of the complaint or grievance) will also assess the effectiveness of the outcome from time to time.

Appeals

There are avenues of appeal if you feel that the complaints procedure has not been followed properly, or that the outcome is unacceptable to you.

7.1 Appeals at school level

- To the Principal if the Principal has not been involved in investigating or examining the complaints, or is not the person named as the source of the grievance.
- To the School Council or another SMT member if the Principal has been involved.

The appeal will consider:

- The way the complaint was handled and examination of the outcome.
- If he/she believes it was handled properly (and in accordance with the steps outlined in this policy) and that the outcome was appropriate he/she will take no further action.
- If he/she thinks that the complaint was not handled properly (and in accordance with the steps outlined in this policy), or that the outcome was inappropriate, he/she will organise for the complaint to be looked at again.

Someone other than the person who first handled the complaint will always deal with an appeal.

7.2 To an external agency

If you are not happy with the way your complaint has been dealt with by the school, you may wish to go to an external agency for further advice and assistance. You may take your complaint to the external agency at any stage in the procedure if you are unhappy with progress in dealing with your complaint. The agencies that would most likely have jurisdiction are:

- Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (Federal).
- Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission.
- VIT (see 1.4 and 3.3 above).
- VRQA (see 1.4 and 3.3 above).
- Consumer Affairs Victoria.
- Fair Work Ombudsman.
- WorkSafe Advisory Service.
- Overseas Students Ombudsman.
- The Australian Health Practitioner Regulatory Authority (AHPRA).

Child Protection Procedures

Nothing in this document replaces procedures developed by the school in respect of the investigation of matters arising under the Child Safe Standards in the AGS Child Safe Policy (2016).

Record Keeping

Records of complaints, interviews and other documentation relating to a complaint are kept at the school (where dealt with at school level) in a separate complaints file. If the complaint is about a person, documents are placed in a restricted access file. If there are considered to be serious ongoing management or care issues relating to a complaint, there will be a cross-reference to the restricted file on the staff member or student file.

A form is provided in Appendix 1 for any persons wishing to submit a complaint, but the use of this form is not compulsory.

Designated Persons for Complaints

10.1(Parents, Students)

All staff at Alphington Grammar School are able to receive complaints in the first instance as all staff share the responsibility for the care and well-being of students. This includes teaching and non-teaching staff. If the complaint is able to be resolved immediately, and no further action is deemed necessary, the person receiving the complaint will document it appropriately in their personal file for future reference.

Once a formal complaint has been lodged either in writing or verbally, a Designated Person will be identified according to the nature of the complaint.

In the Secondary School this could be: Subject Teacher, Head of House(s) Secondary, Assistant Principal-Head of Secondary, Director of Teaching & Learning, Principal.

In the Primary School this could be: Classroom teacher, Pre-Prep Director, P-2 Head of House, Deputy Head of Primary, Assistant Principal- Head of Primary, Director of Teaching & Learning, Principal.

Where a classroom or subject teacher is the initial Designated Person, they will co-opt a senior staff member to assist in the investigation. In many cases the senior staff member becomes the Designated Person.

10.2 (Staff)

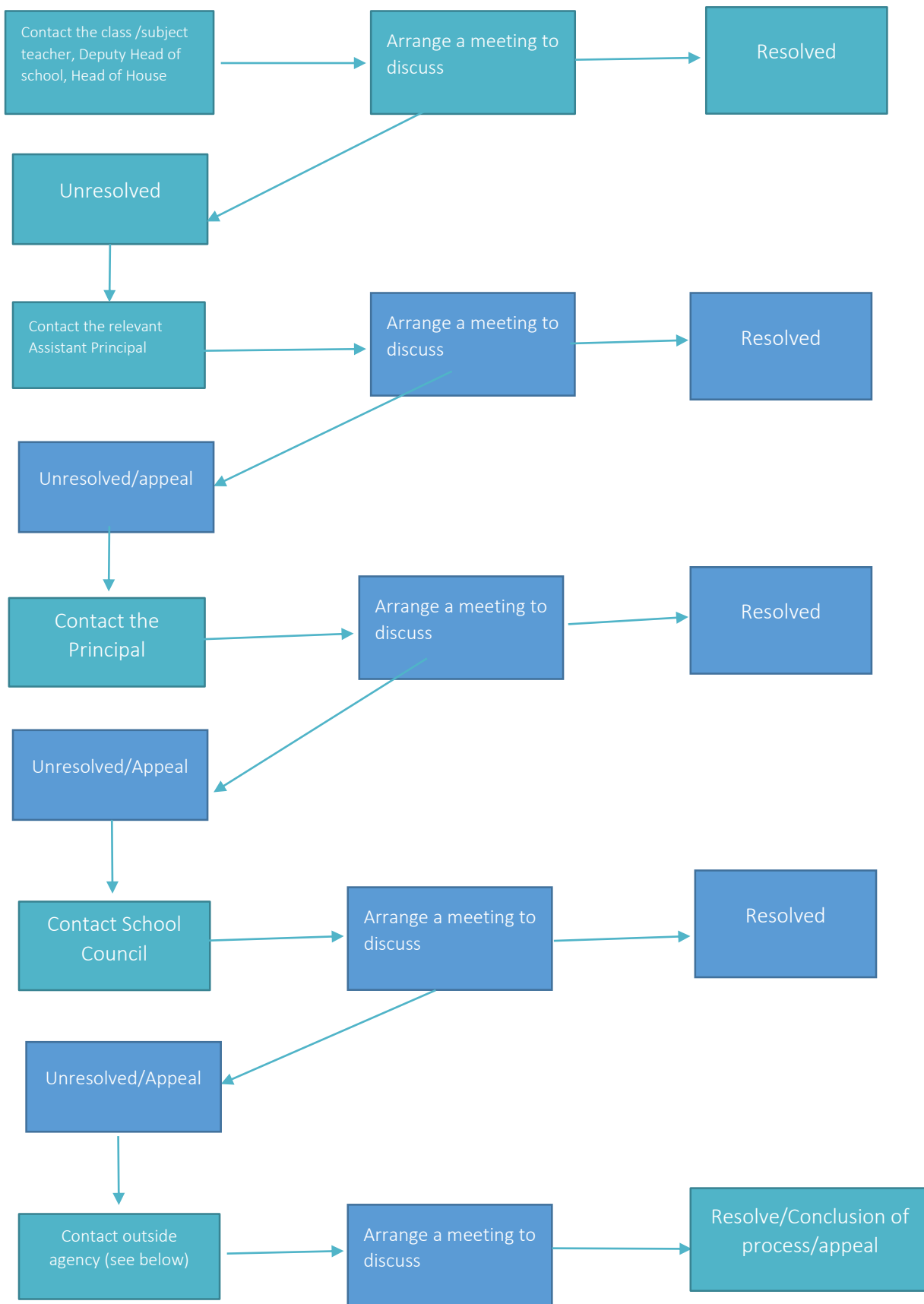
The well-being of staff is a priority at Alphington Grammar School. Formal complaints made by staff should be addressed with the Assistant Principal-Head of Secondary, the Assistant Principal-Head of Primary, or, the Principal.

Staff may also make a formal complaint to the Business Manager, a Head of Faculty or Chair of the School Council.

Complaints, Grievances & Concerns: Flowchart for Parents/Caregivers/ Families

Note: this is the recommended process. The school recognises the right of any complainant to directly approach senior staff should the complainant feel this is warranted.

See flowchart on next page.



If matters still remain unresolved you have the right to seek arbitration through the courts, ombudsman, legal representation, other government commissions or regulatory authorities. Mediation is an option at any stage if the parties agree. Normally mediation is arranged by a Senior Staff member.

Complaints, Grievances & Concerns: Advice and Flowchart for Students

At Alphington Grammar school, we believe that it is important that everyone feels happy and safe so that the best learning can take place. We believe that everyone, staff and students, need to work closely together to provide the best educational opportunities for you. If you have a problem, a concern or a complaint, we encourage you to speak to someone about it and we have provided some steps that you might work through to help you do this. You may make a complaint about any other person in the school community. You have the right to be listened to, be heard and taken seriously.

What to do if you have a problem:

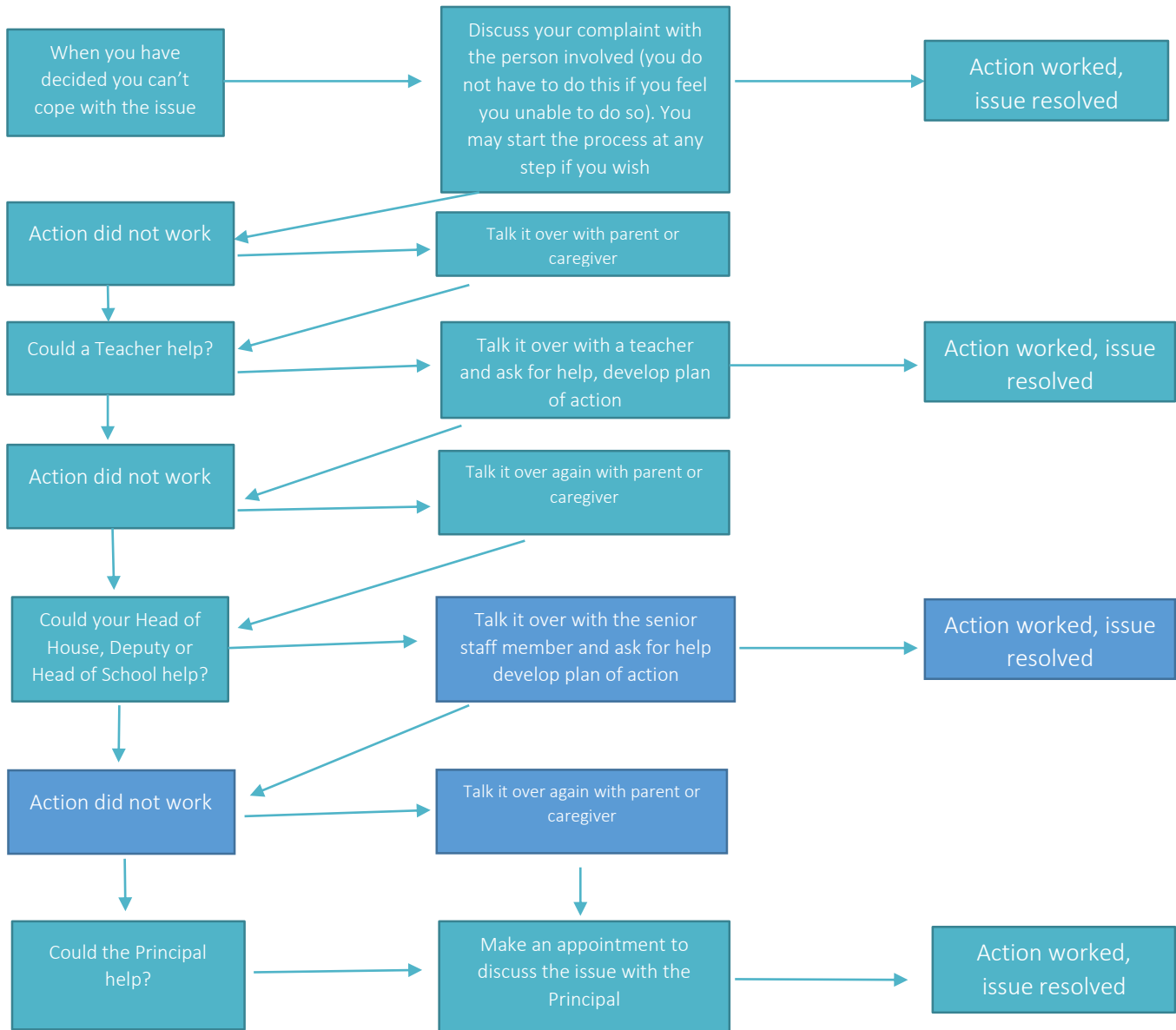
- Try to identify the problem that is upsetting you. If there is more than one problem, list them so that you are clear about what you feel or need.
- If you can, talk to the person you are having the problem with and if their behaviour is upsetting you, tell them to stop.
- If you do not feel that you could do this or, if your talk with the person does not solve your problem, talk to a teacher or other trusted staff member about your concerns and ask them to help you deal with it. This person will often be able to give you good ideas on how to cope with it and will help you. You can also talk to your parent or caregiver who might help you express your concern. You will need to explain:

Who was involved, what happened, what you did and, what you believe to be unfair or unjust.

- Try to stay calm when discussing your problem or concern. Even if you don't feel it, being calm will help you get your concerns across more clearly than if you are upset or angry. It may help to take someone with you. This could be a friend or a parent.
- Work with a teacher or a staff member you trust to decide what should be done to help you.

You can also ask for help from the staff in the School Health Centre as well.

Complaint, Grievances and Concerns: Flowchart for Students



If matters still remain unresolved you have the right to seek arbitration through the courts, ombudsman, legal representation, other government commissions or regulatory authorities. Mediation is an option at any stage if the parties agree. Normally mediation is arranged by a Senior Staff member.

You are not obliged to involve your parent/caregiver in the process but the school recommends this. The school cannot guarantee that your complaint will be kept confidential from your parent/caregiver if we judge that it is in your best interests to let them know what is happening. If you are upset or worried you could consider speaking to a school psychologist who will be able to support you.

It is important to remember that there is a solution for every problem and you should **NEVER** think that a situation can't be fixed.

Complaints, Grievances & Concerns: Advice and Flowchart for Staff

At Alphington Grammar School, we believe that the relationship between colleagues is a *very* important part of ensuring that children are happy, secure and open to learning. We recognise that all staff need to work closely together to provide the best educational opportunities for the students in our care. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding any other member of the school community, we strongly encourage you to work together to resolve these as promptly and effectively as you can.

What to do if you have a problem:

- Try to identify the problem clearly before taking any action. If there is more than one problem, list them to ensure that the extent of the problem is clear to the school.
- Decide whether the problem is a concern, enquiry or complaint. This will help in finding a solution.
- In the interests of resolving matters quickly and effectively, you are encouraged to informally discuss your concern/complaint with the person concerned (if you feel you are able to).

You may also wish to informally discuss your concerns with a senior staff member (e.g. Assistant Principal) and seek advice and assistance.

If informal strategies do not resolve the issue, make your complaint formally and in writing to the Principal. Where the Principal advises, mediation can be arranged between the parties concerned, with their mutual agreement. The school will be able to offer support to the parties concerned.

If you still do not feel that the matter has been resolved, if your complaint is serious or involves the Principal, telephone or send your complaint in writing to the School Council who will then contact you and make arrangements for you to discuss your grievance.

If you do not wish to involve the School Council, Principal or other senior staff member, you can, at any time, seek advice from your school union representative or from the industry union directly.

If matters still remain unresolved you have the right to seek arbitration through the courts, ombudsman, legal representation and other government commissions such as Workplace Safety, Anti-Discrimination and Human Rights Commissions. These might entail some financial cost to you.

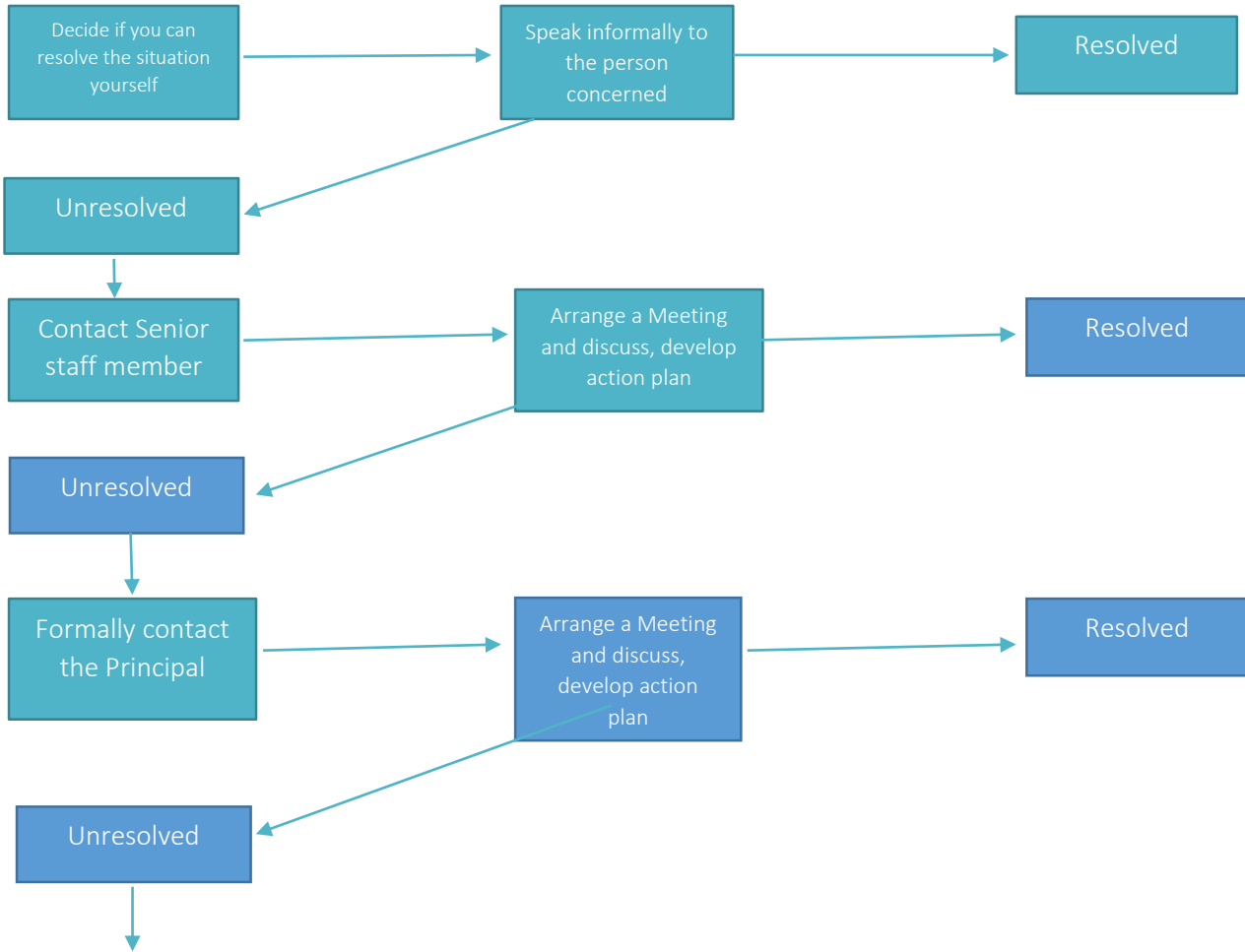
When you decide to make a complaint:

- If a complaint is made against a person, that person will be informed of the nature and content of the complaint and will have the right to respond.
- Discussions of complaints are confidential (see 2.2 page 4 of this policy)
- Complaints may be made verbally or in writing.

- All complaints, the actions taken to resolve them and outcomes of those actions will be fully documented.
- A person who has made a complaint may withdraw it at any time. If the complaint is in writing, the withdrawal should also be in writing.
- No one will be victimised as a result of taking out a formal complaint.
- At the formal stage, a person who has made a complaint has the right to be represented and supported by another person e.g. his/her union representative, work colleague, friend or other person of his/her choice as a support person.
- A process of mediation is an option at any stage of the process.

Complaints, Grievances & Concerns: Flowchart of Staff on next page.

Complaints, Grievances & Concerns: Flowchart for Staff



If matters still remain unresolved you have the right to seek arbitration through the courts, ombudsman, legal representation, other government commissions or regulatory authorities. Mediation is an option at any stage if the parties agree. Normally mediation is arranged by a Senior Staff member.

This process does not override the right of any staff member to seek guidance from his or her union. Staff are permitted to bring a support person to any meeting at any stage.

Staff are encouraged to seek support from the school psychologist if they need to.

Complaints, Grievances & Concerns: Advice & Flowchart for Wider Community

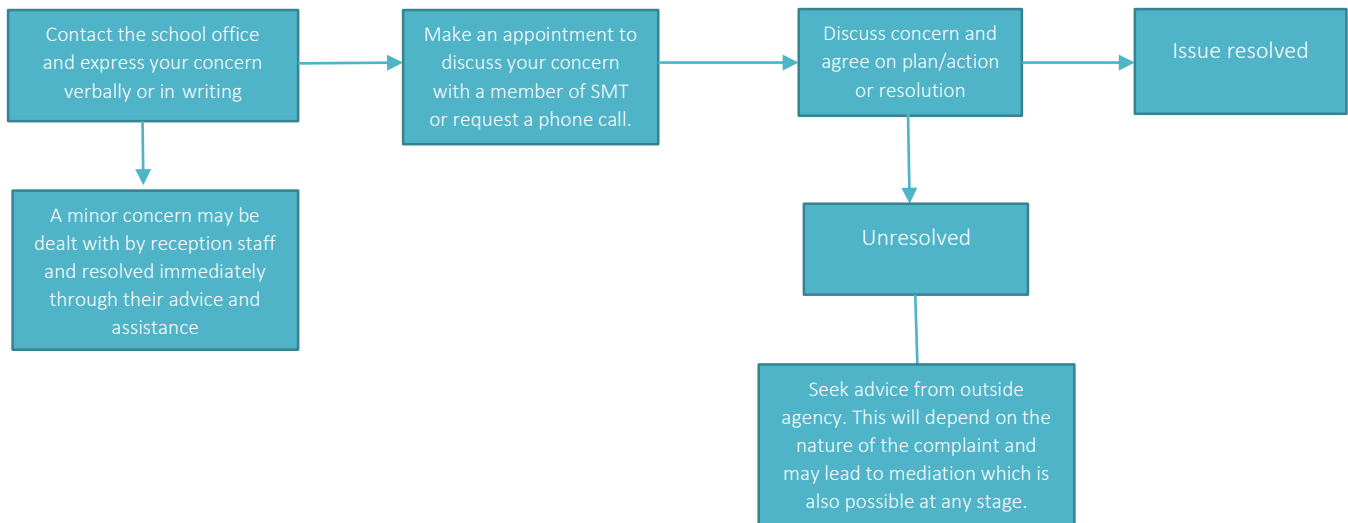
At our school, we believe that open, friendly and constructive relationships with our community are vital to our growth and the good of the community. Our intent is to resolve any community concerns concerning the school to the mutual satisfaction of all concerned.

What to do if you have a complaint, grievance or concern:

- Try to identify the problem clearly before contacting the school. If there is more than one problem, list them to ensure that the extent of the matter is clear to the school.
- Decide whether the problem is a concern, grievance, enquiry or complaint. This will help in finding a solution. For low level concerns, the reception staff may be able to assist or advise you immediately.
- Make an appointment to meet or speak to (in person or by telephone) with the Assistant Principal/s, or Principal, Business Manager or Director of Teaching & Learning. (Senior Management Team). The best way to do this is to contact the school office to arrange a mutually convenient time for a telephone call or meeting to take place.
- After this initial contact, if you do not feel that the matter has been resolved or if your complaint is about a serious matter, send your complaint in writing directly to the Principal.
- If matters still remain unresolved you have the right to seek arbitration through the courts, ombudsman, legal representation and other government commissions such as Human Rights Commission etc. These might entail some financial cost to you.

What happens when a Complaint is made/received?

- If a complaint is made against a person, that person will be informed of the nature and content of the complaint and have the right to respond.
- Discussions of complaints are confidential (see 2.2 page 4 of this policy)
- Complaints may be made verbally or in writing.
- All complaints, the actions taken to resolve them and outcomes of those actions will be fully documented.
- A person who has made a complaint will be informed of the steps taken
- A person who made the complaint may withdraw it at any time. If the complaint is in writing, the withdrawal should also be in writing.
- No one will be victimised as a result of lodging a formal grievance.
- At the formal stage, a person who has made a complaint has the right to be represented and supported by another person of his/her choice as a support person.
- A process of mediation is an option at any stage of the procedure.



Staff Guidelines for Handling Complaints

Alphington Grammar School recognises that all staff may sometimes be in the position when they need to deal with concerns, complaints and grievances. Usually these will be from parents, caregivers and students but occasionally from members of the wider community.

The following guidelines are provided to staff to assist them in implementing this policy and will be the subject of regular internal or externally provided Professional Learning.

Staff are advised to be mindful at all times that harmonious relationships underpin successful schooling.

GUIDELINES FOR RESPONDING TO COMPLAINTS/GRIEVANCES (these guidelines are in outline form only and serve to form the basis of practical workshops for staff).

Dealing with the Complainant's Feelings:

This can be achieved by:

- Listening carefully.
- Acknowledging his/her concerns.
- Avoiding immediate judgments avoiding debate in early stages of the discussion.
- The use of positive body language.

Dealing with the Specific Elements of a Complaint:

This can be achieved by:

- Determining the nature of the complaint. Is it about policy, procedures, process, the quality of education, the behaviour of individuals, etc.?
- The specific details of the complaint may shape what the complainant wants to achieve in terms of resolution.
- Take comprehensive notes including details of times, place of conversations, witnesses etc.
- Ensure any meeting notes are distributed to all those present or involved in the dispute resolution process.

Minimizing the Risk of Escalation:

These next steps in the process can be used if the complaint is not immediately resolved.

They could include:

- Further investigation/research determining if there is another appropriate mechanism to handle the complaint, including meeting any legislative requirements.
- Setting boundaries on the investigation.
- Setting a timeline for responses.
- Referral to key personnel with expertise, where appropriate.

Objective Judgment:

- Present the complaint without being in any way judgmental if it needs to be presented to others during investigation.

Confidentiality:

- This should be strictly observed and all issues handled on a 'need to know' basis. The complainant should be advised on the school's intention to treat all complaints confidentially and that information will only be shared as needed.

Responding:

Good practice in responding to a complaint would include:

- Meeting timelines (or inform about delays).
- Providing reasons for decisions.
- Allowing the complainant a fair hearing.
- Responding in accordance with the merits of the complaint, along with the ethos/values of the school and/or on legislation and/or legal advice.
- Sharing meeting notes with all concerned and documenting agreed process.

Monitoring and Follow-Up:

Follow-up by the designated staff member (for example on student behaviour issues) should take place to ensure that the action taken is effective.

Record Keeping:

This is an important aspect of the process to ensure transparency and fairness for all concerned.

- Staff handling day to day concerns should record them in the specified pastoral file on the school server and attach any scanned notes as references.
- Staff handling more serious concerns should additionally inform senior staff of the ongoing (or resolved) issue via email and alert them to the pastoral notes kept.
- All written complaints should be scanned to the appropriate complaints folders on the school server or in the allied student pastoral folder if the issue concerns a student.
- The Principal and the Business Manager will oversee the Complaints folder concerning issues raised by the wider community.
- All Server folders are protected by access protocols to ensure confidentiality.
- Staff handling complaints should ensure that there is a timely chain of communication between the school and the complainant including the sharing of meeting notes (formal, not personal), action plans and any resolutions reached.

Angry and Aggressive Complainants

Some suggestions in handling angry and aggressive complainants include:

- Listening attentively.
- Making notes of each key point.
- Not becoming defensive or angry in response.
- Showing empathy with the complainant's emotion but reserve the right to request that the complainant be civil.
- Giving due consideration to the complainant's concerns, even if you consider they have a particular motive.
- Taking notes without defensive comment, repeating them to the complainant and asking whether it represents an accurate record of the allegations.
- Ensuring the safety and well-being of staff and students present during an interview. This may involve terminating the interview, telephone conversation or not responding to abusive emails.

Some requests for action may be dealt with immediately. For example, a parent may demand that a teacher be dismissed, or suspended from classroom activities. In such an instance, the complainant should be informed that matters of staff management remain the province of the Principal.

Collegiate Approach

Except for relatively minor day to day concerns, staff should not attempt to solve complex issues without consulting a senior staff member. This could be a member of SMT, Deputy Head, or a Head of House or member of the Exceptionality Team. A team approach helps share the burden and lessen the escalation of matters, potential for litigation and stress that sometimes surrounds dealing with issues, particularly if they are emotive or complicated.

The Role of the Exceptionality Team

The Exceptionality Team has wide expertise in many aspects that may be relevant to the handling of concerns, grievances and complaints.

Any member of the school community may use the Exceptionality Team as the first point of contact with regards to issues and the team will help, support and advise on and throughout the process as required.

Staff are reminded that they should not 'diagnose' students with regards to learning or behavioural problems and are strongly advised against 'wondering aloud' with parents around these issues. In all cases where staff /parents suspect a diagnosable condition, a member of the exceptionality team should be consulted before a response is made to the parent/caregiver.

Exceptionality Team meetings at a sub school level will sometimes be involved in the ongoing monitoring of situations that arise from issues subject to this policy. It is important to recognise that the Teaching Staff need to take the responsibility for the enforcement of and action or plan or consequence, but that the Exceptionality Team will support this within the terms of their scope of operation.

Policy Date	Principal Approval (signed)	This Version Ratified by School Council
2011, 2013, This review:2016 Next Review: 2018		April 2016

Policy References:

- Australian /New Zealand Standard AS/NZS 10002:2014 Guidelines for Complaint Management in Organizations
- Guidelines for Complaint Handling, Ombudsman Western Australia ,2014
- Complispace, Complaint Handling In Schools, James Field, 2014
- Association of Independent Schools South Australian, Handling Complaints
- Victorian Institute of Teaching, website
- Victorian Registration & Qualifications Authority, website
- Alphington Grammar School Policies & Procedures

Appendix 1.

Alphington Grammar School Complaints Handling Form

This form will help you provide the school with information about your issue.

Your details:

First Name:	Family Name:
Relationship with Alphington Grammar School (e.g. parent, staff, student, neighbour etc.):	
Your address:	
Contact details: Phone (home): Phone (work): Mobile: Email:	

Details of the Concern, Grievance or Complaint:

(Please include all information you can e.g.: dates, events, witnesses. If you need to, you can attach extra pages or documentation you believe relevant)

Have you taken any action to resolve the issue yourself?

Yes

No

If yes, please include details below (e.g. who you have spoken to, what you said and, what was done etc.)

What action do you believe is needed now to resolve the problem?

Your signature: _____ Date: _____

School Use Only:

Date form received: _____

Received by: _____

Date acknowledged sent: _____

Acknowledgement sent by: _____