

COMPLAINTS POLICY

1. PURPOSE OF THIS POLICY

St Hilda's Anglican School for Girls (**St Hilda's**) takes complaints seriously. We are committed to resolving complaints in an open and responsive way, for all within the School community, as well as for those outside the community.

In line with our School value of respect, it is critical to empower our young people to understand their rights, to report problems and concerns and effectively support them to constructively and effectively address the issue. All complaints will be dealt with fairly and in a prompt and professional manner.

2. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Fairness and equity

- The School strives to act with fairness and a lack of bias, or perception of bias.
- Each party to a complaint will be provided an opportunity to be heard, in person or in writing as appropriate and to respond to the allegations and/or evidence offered by the other.
- Issues or facts which are disputed will be investigated and complaint outcomes will be supported by the evidence and consistent with the School's established policy.
- Complaint outcomes will be finalised by an adjudicator, who may also be the investigator, who is free from bias or the perception of bias. Depending upon the level of complexity, an investigation informs the decision making process which is finalised by an adjudicator.

Transparency and openness

- The School is open to the concerns of parents and students.
- The School will provide adequate resources for effective handling of complaints.
- Where necessary, an authorised person will conduct a formal examination and investigation of the complaint and/or areas of disputation.
- The School will treat all complaints in a confidential and respectful manner. Complaints made by parents will not adversely affect their children and, similarly, complaints raised by the students will affect them or other students.

3. WHAT IS A COMPLAINT?

Per the definition in the *AS/NZS 1002:2014 Guidelines for Complaint Management in Organisations*, a complaint is:

An 'expression of dissatisfaction made to or about an organisation, related to its products, services, staff or the handling of a complaint where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required'.

A complaint may be made if a parent or carer thinks that the school has, for example:

- done something wrong, not followed school procedures;
- failed to do something it/they should have done;
- acted unfairly or impolitely; or
- ignored their concern.

A complaint may be made about the School as a whole, about a specific department in the school or about an individual member of staff, or about one or more students.

4. CHILD-FRIENDLY PROCESS

The School is committed to ensuring their complaints process is child-friendly and that students feel respected, valued, listened and responded to.

All our staff, including support staff and volunteers, have been trained to take children and young people seriously when they raise a matter of concern. The issue, no matter how trivial, will be dealt with respectfully and in accordance with the School's policy and procedures.

All staff have been appropriately and adequately trained to manage complaints related to child protection matters.

A student may make the complaint themselves, but also has the option of choosing someone, with whom they feel comfortable, to accompany them or to complain on their behalf.

5. PROCESS

5.1. Response time

The School will acknowledge complaints within five (5) school days. We will seek to resolve complaints within ten (10) school days wherever possible. In all cases, you will be kept informed of the progress of your complaint.

5.2. Lodging a complaint

Complaints may be lodged verbally by phone, in-person, by letter, email or via the complaints form on the School's website.

If necessary, the School will provide a complainant with support to formulate and lodge a complaint. The School will also provide support for staff against whom a complaint is made. Students may choose to make a complaint themselves, or they may choose to bring along another student or an adult for support. In some circumstances, e.g. for overseas students, translators or support persons may also attend meetings or assist as necessary.

5.3. Information required when making a complaint

When making a complaint, please provide the following information:

- The nature of the complaint.
- Copies of any relevant correspondence or documents relating directly to the complaint.
- What you consider may be required to resolve the complaint.

Vexatious, trivial and spurious complaints (i.e. those brought for improper reasons or without substantial merit) will not be progressed. If this is the case, the complainant will be advised of this fact in writing.

5.4. Anonymous complaints

An anonymous complaint is where there is no name or address supplied or where the complainants say they do not wish to be identified.

Parents and students are encouraged to give their names and sufficient details for any complaint to be properly considered. Matters will be dealt with sensitively. If a complainant persists in wishing to remain anonymous, the Principal will determine what action, if any, will be taken, depending on the nature of the complaint. For example, where the identity of the complainant is necessary in progressing further investigations or formulating allegations, further reasonable inquiry may be impractical.

5.5. Former students

St Hilda's accepts complaints from former students and their parents or guardians.

If you have any complaints or concerns, we encourage you to contact the Principal. However:

- If a former student (currently over the age of 18) has experienced any form of abuse as a student and wishes to report this behaviour, we encourage the former student and/or their parents or guardians to report this to the Principal and also the WA Police to enable the appropriate actions to be taken.
- If a former student (still under the age of 18), or their parents or guardians wish to report any form of abuse, we encourage them to contact the Principal and also the Department of Child Protection and Family Support.

5.6. Overseas students

Overseas students should use the same informal and formal complaints procedure as other students, as set out in this document. All complaints/appeals (involving the School, its agents or any relevant related party) will be considered and responded to.

In line with the requirements of the *National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018*, for matters relating to the appeals process over enrolment, attendance or academic progress breaches, overseas students and parents must access the School's complaints process within 20 working days of an issue arising. For all other matters relating to overseas students, no similar time limits apply.

For issues relating to unsatisfactory progress, if the student chooses not to access the process or withdraws from the process, or the process is completed and results in a decision supporting the School, the School must notify the Department of Education that the student has not achieved the satisfactory course progress.

If an overseas student is not satisfied with the result of the internal complaint appeals process, within ten (10) working days the student may access an external appeals process by contacting the Overseas Students Ombudsman at www.ombudsman.gov.au or 1800 117 000. This service is free and independent for external appeals and complaints about decisions made by the School. If the sanction imposed by the School was suspension or expulsion, the student's enrolment and provision of relevant course content will be maintained whilst the complaints and appeals process is underway.

If the outcome of the external appeals process results in a decision or recommendation in favour of the overseas student, the School will advise the student of that outcome, implement the decision or recommendation and take appropriate corrective action.

5.7. Queries regarding the progress of the complaint

You may enquire as to the progress of your complaint at any time by contacting the appropriate person directly.

6. OUTCOME OF A COMPLAINT

The outcome of all written complaints will be provided to you in writing including reasons explaining the outcome.

If you are dissatisfied with the School's resolution of your complaint, you may wish to express your concerns to the Principal. This request can be made verbally but preferably in writing.

Serious complaints will be shared with the Chair of Council by the Principal. There may be certain circumstances, such as complaints about the Principal or a Council member, when the parents need to direct their complaint in writing to the Chair.

Where required, the School will refer the matter to an external authority, e.g. the Department for Child Protection or the Western Australian Police Service or the WA Police for advice or immediate action. In this situation, the Principal, or in their absence, another member of the School's Executive, must take responsibility for action in the School and the Chair of Council informed as soon as possible.

Depending on the circumstances, the School may also need to submit a Critical Incident Report to the Department of Education and the Director General of Education. Non-government schools in Western Australia are required to be registered by the Director General of the Department of Education. Registration provides assurance to parents and the community that non-government schools meet the standards determined by the Minister and other requirements specified in the *School Education Act 1999* and the *School Education Regulations 2000*.

7. INTRACABLE COMPLAINTS

Most complaints can be resolved if approached positively. However, a complaint may become intractable due to its nature or to the way in which it was handled. Intractable complaints are usually taken to the Chair of Council.

- (*Referral to the Chair of Council*) In some cases the Principal will refer the matter to the Chair of Council and inform the parents of the same. A situation may also arise where the complainant is unhappy with the Principal's response. In this case the parent should write directly to the Chair. The Chair will discuss the matter fully with the Principal and be provided with relevant documentation. The Chair will then respond to the parents, notifying them that he/she is reviewing the matter and provide a date by which they may expect a response.
- (*Meeting with the Chair of Council*) If a meeting is requested, the Chair would offer to meet the parents at a convenient time. Those involved in the meeting are: the Chair of Council, the Principal, (at most) one other member of staff, and the parents. Parents are permitted to bring with them a supportive friend who is not involved with the complaint. The Chair, will listen to the parents and the Principal, in the hope that a solution may be found. If this is not possible, and the parents wish to take the matter further, they may wish to seek the advice of an independent arbitrator.

- (*Referral to an arbiter*) As a final step in the disputes and complaints procedure, if appropriate, the school may choose to use an independent arbiter to resolve the issue. The arbiter would have to be agreed by both parties and remunerated by both parties (if appropriate). The parties would, as a matter of course, agree to submit to the decision of the arbiter.
- (*Further action*) At all stages of a complaints resolution procedure the complainant should be reminded that they can seek legal advice if they wish, especially at the point where the school has done all it can to reach a resolution.

8. RECORDS

St Hilda's will keep a log of complaints in a Complaints Register. All written correspondence will be saved electronically. Records concerning students will be kept for a minimum of seven (7) years after the student reaches eighteen (18) years of age. The School will maintain clear confidential records of the complaint, the actions taken and the outcome. These records may become the cause of future legal action. Patterns in the records may indicate a need for action. The School will review the Complaints Register to enable the detection of any patterns emerging over time.

9. RESULTS

Where a complaint results in the identification of a need for change in the School's procedures, those changes will be made and notification that action has been taken communicated in writing to the complainant.

Responsibility: Director of People and Culture
Review Date: July 2020
Next review date: July 2021



COMPLAINTS | FAQ AND SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

St Hilda's Anglican School for Girls (**St Hilda's**) is committed to continuously reviewing what we do and improving. As a result, we welcome your suggestions, feedback and complaints.

All complaints will be considered earnestly and will contribute to the ongoing improvement of our processes and standards.

This policy deals with procedures for parents, guardians and students.

CHILD SAFETY

St Hilda's is a child safe organisation. We are committed to ensuring the safety, welfare and wellbeing of all children at the School. Our school environment is one that prioritises the safety, happiness and empowerment of children. We have zero tolerance towards child abuse and inappropriate behaviour towards children. All allegations and safety concerns raised in this regard will be treated very seriously and with priority.

INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

How do I make a complaint?

- By talking about it – or by writing it down if you find that easier.
- You can do it by yourself, or as part of a group, or through your parents.

To whom can I make a complaint?

- We recommend you discuss the issue with your classroom teacher (Junior School) or Head of Year (Senior School). However, you may also speak with any other staff member you feel more comfortable with.

Does it matter what the issue is?

- No, it can be a big problem or a small one.

What will happen next?

- If possible, the staff member to whom you have made the complaint will deal with it in person. If not, they will go on your behalf to someone who can help.

Do others have to know?

- The teacher or person you speak with will not talk to anyone else about your issue unless they must do so for your safety and wellbeing.
- If you are worried about other people knowing, tell the staff member – they will understand.
- Even if you find the issue hurtful or embarrassing, don't worry – it will only be discussed by staff, who can help you.

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

St Hilda's welcomes suggestions and comments from parents/guardians.

We take all complaints and concerns seriously. The vast majority of complaints will be resolved shortly after having been brought to our attention.

How can I make a complaint?

- Members of staff are happy to help. We recommend parents contact the person who knows their daughter best (i.e, Head of Year (Senior School), classroom teacher (Junior School) or the Dean of Boarding). They may be able to deal with the issue quickly and effectively.
- If the matter involves an issue regarding that person, please contact the relevant Dean of Academics (Senior and Junior Schools) for academic matters and the relevant Deans of Student Wellbeing (Senior and Junior School) for other matters.
- Serious matters, including those relating to child safety, should be raised directly with the Principal.

I am not sure whether to raise an issue or not

- If, as a parent or guardian, you have concerns, please raise them. We are committed to assisting you resolve any issues you have.
- If in doubt, you should contact the school, as we are here to help.

What happens after I raise an issue?

- If you raise something face-to-face or by telephone, it may be possible to resolve the matter quickly and constructively.
- If you have made a complaint or suggestion in writing, we will contact you within five (5) working days, to respond to your concerns and explain how we propose to proceed.
- Often, the person you contact will need to discuss the matter appropriately with a colleague, gather relevant information and consider it further before responding.
- You will be given a date by which you will receive a response. If further consideration of the issue is needed, you will be notified.
- Parents need to be aware that in some cases the school will not be able to discuss the details of action taken as it would be inappropriate. For example, matters involving private information or staff discipline will not be discussed in detail. Further, the School cannot provide information of matters which require the involvement of a relevant government authority, without the permission of that government authority.

What if I want the issue to remain confidential?

- Your complaint or concern will be treated in a confidential manner and with respect. Knowledge of it will be limited to those directly involved and those with a role in managing it.
- In some limited circumstances, there may be a requirement to make third parties outside the school aware of the complaint and possibly also the identity of those involved (e.g. child safety issues).
- In terms of anonymous complaints, we would prefer to know the identity of a person making a complaint as it can help in investigation and resolution. Anonymous complaints will be noted

and dealt with in accordance with the circumstances, available information and the action required.

What if I am not satisfied with the outcome?

- If you are not satisfied with the outcome following a process involving the Principal, the Principal will offer to refer the matter to the Chair of School Council. Alternatively, you may wish to write directly to the Chair.
- The Chair will be provided with a report from the Principal, and will examine matters thoroughly before responding to ensure that the complaint has been handled in accordance with the School's policy and procedure as well as to give further consideration.
- After being notified of the outcome of the Chair's review and consideration, you may be offered the opportunity to meet with the Chair if you remain concerned. You may wish to be supported by a friend, but legal representation is not appropriate.
- If the meeting does not bring about a resolution, and the parties agree, the matter may be referred to an independent arbiter. It is the arbiter's task to look at the issues in an impartial and confidential manner.

The School recognises and acknowledges your entitlement to raise issues and complaints and we hope to work with you in the best interests of the children and young people in our care.

PROCEDURE FOR SUGGESTIONS AND COMPLAINTS

