



SHOALHAVEN REGION ANGLICAN SCHOOLS

Concerns and Complaints Policy

Shoalhaven Region Anglican Schools recognises that involving parents in their child's education is critical to children's development and learning. It emphasises fostering positive relationships with parents and families and developing strong school community partnerships.

Shoalhaven Region Anglican Schools also recognises that in all partnerships there will be times when there are disagreements and issues of concern that will need to be resolved.

Some concerns raised by parents are complex; however in all cases an open, consistent approach that is courteous, efficient and fair best addresses parent concerns. Such an approach provides opportunities to build partnerships between schools and families.

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 part of the team. It is not fair that she is left out and I want you to do something about it!

The policy does not apply to matters about which there are existing rights of (and processes for) review or appeal. If, at any stage, it becomes apparent that the concern or complaint relates to such matters, the relevant procedures should be implemented immediately. This policy is not applicable where a complainant has employed another party to represent them, such as a solicitor. In these circumstances, the concern or complaint should be referred to the Sydney Anglican Schools Corporation for their assessment. However a complainant is entitled to an advocate who can be a friend or colleague or a person provided through an appropriate support agency who does not receive a fee for service.

Concerns and complaints must be addressed in line with the values of the Shoalhaven Region Anglican Schools regarding treating each other with dignity and respect. Shoalhaven Region Anglican Schools is committed to providing safe and supportive work environments where diversity is valued and everyone is treated with respect, fairness and dignity. Discrimination, sexual and other forms of harassment, bullying, violence and threatening behaviour are unacceptable. All employees, students, parents and visitors in schools are expected to act accordingly.

The School Executive and Council, will act to ensure that the safety, security, health and wellbeing of all employees, students, parents and visitors in schools are protected. All staff must observe the Schools' code of conduct.

Shoalhaven Region Anglican Schools expects that all parties will, when addressing concerns and complaints:

- maintain the confidentiality of all parties, in line with the Schools' policies and legislative requirements
- acknowledge that their common goal is to achieve an outcome acceptable to all parties
- act in good faith and in a calm and courteous manner
- show respect and understanding of each other's point of view and value difference, rather than judge and blame
- recognise that all parties have rights and responsibilities which must be balanced.

Principals should ensure that parents are aware of their right to advocacy when communicating the issues involved in their complaint and in negotiating an outcome. In addition to the expectations of all parties above, the Schools will address complaints:

- courteously
- efficiently
- fairly
- promptly, within timelines agreed with the person with the concern or complaint (where possible concerns or complaints should be addressed within 20 school days)
- in accordance with due process and where appropriate, the principles of natural justice.

Parent concern or complaint

A parent can raise a concern or complaint about any aspect of a school's operations. In the first instance, they should take a concern or make a complaint to the school. Any complaint raised with the Sydney Anglican Schools Corporation that has not been raised at the school level will be referred to the school for resolution (unless there are special circumstances which prevent the school from managing the complaint).

The Executive Principal will determine the appropriate complaint procedure as concerns and complaints relating to a school are most effectively addressed by the school. A school must make every effort to resolve a concern or complaint related to it before involving the School Council or Sydney Anglican Schools Corporation.

Escalating to the School Council or Sydney Anglican Schools Corporation office

If the school is unable to resolve a complaint, the issue can be raised with the School Council or the Sydney Anglican Schools Corporation for support as appropriate.

Complex complaints are those that:

- defy resolution over a long period of time
- involve complex issues (including issues involving more than one school)
- may include complaints about the Executive Principal.

If a parent with a concern or complaint is not satisfied with the outcome determined by the school, they can contact the School Council, by placing their concern or complaint in writing and addressing this to the Chair of Council through the Executive Principal of Shoalhaven Region Anglican Schools.

The Chair of Council will respond to complaints received and, where appropriate, acknowledge, in writing, the receipt of a written complaint. He will, as far as possible, attempt to resolve the issue raised by the complainant and provide a final response within a reasonable time frame.

Complaint resolved

A complaint is considered to be resolved when the complainant and the School agree on an appropriate response or remedy.

Possible responses and remedies include:

- an explanation
- an acknowledgement of each other's perspective and agreement on ways to manage differences
- an apology or expression of regret
- an admission of fault
- a change of decision
- a change of policy, procedure or practice
- agreement on what constitutes acceptable behaviour
- an undertaking that unacceptable behaviour will change
- the waiving of debt related to school fees and payments
- a refund of parent payments
- the provision of counselling or other support.

Remedies should be implemented as soon as possible.

Complaint dismissed

A complaint can only be dismissed:

- after it has been investigated
- if an investigation has determined that the complaint cannot be substantiated.

Complaint unresolved

A complaint is considered to be unresolved if the complainant does not agree on a course of action and/or a remedy, or if the remedy cannot be implemented.

It may not always be possible to fully resolve all complaints to the complainant's satisfaction. This could happen if the complainant has unrealistic expectations about the outcome of their complaint, or if the School's policies or regulations are contrary to their views. If the complaint remains unresolved at the completion of all investigative procedures, or if the

complainant is dissatisfied with the manner in which the complaint was handled by the school, the Executive Principal may inform the complainant of options for review by an external agency such as Ombudsman NSW.

Anonymous complaints

Shoalhaven Region Anglican Schools requires all complaints to be investigated. However, it recognises that its staff might not be able to fully investigate a complaint if they cannot effectively liaise with the complainant. Furthermore, anonymous complaints raise natural justice issues for respondents who have a right to know the particulars of the allegations made against them. The Executive Principal should determine the extent to which an anonymous complaint received by the school shall be investigated. Where the complaint is about the principal of a school the decision to investigate the complaint shall be made by the Chair of Council.

Unreasonable complainant conduct

Unreasonable complainant conduct is behaviour that:

- is clearly and significantly outside the expectations of confidentiality, cooperation, courtesy and respect
- calls for staff resources and time unjustified by the nature or significance of the complaint
- is vexatious (that is, an action or complaint that is brought without merit, often to cause annoyance to another person)
- is oriented towards conflict.

The Executive Principal, in conjunction with other Executive Staff members can determine if a complainant's conduct is unreasonable. If so determined, they will develop a plan to address the complaint and the complainant's interaction with the school.

When a complainant uses threatening or violent behaviour staff are to follow the protocols outlined in the Communication guidelines.

Staff who feel their safety is in jeopardy are to immediately contact the police.

Communicating and Monitoring Concerns and Complaints

The school should brief all members of staff (including volunteers) about its concerns and complaints procedures. It must also provide staff with access to training and support materials appropriate to their responsibilities under the procedures.

The school should ensure parent complaints are addressed promptly, within agreed timelines where possible. The length of time may vary according to the complexity of the complaint, however, in most cases the school should attempt to resolve parent concerns or complaints within 20 school days. However, from time to time the time frame may be longer. The school will communicate to the complainant any reasons for a delay in addressing their complaint.

Monitoring

The school has an established system of recording complaints and their resolution. The **Complaints form** is found on the Shoalhaven Region Anglican Schools' Wiki or a hard copy is available in the Administration office. Complaints will be filed by the Principal's Executive Assistant.

The Complaints form includes the following details:

- name and contact details (with permission) of the person with a concern or complaint
- the date the concern was expressed or complaint made
- the form in which the concern or complaint was received (such as face-to-face, by telephone, in writing, by email)
- a brief description of the concern or complaint
- details of the school officer responding to the concern or complaint
- action taken on the concern or complaint
- the outcome of action taken on the concern or complaint
- any recommendations for future improvement in the school's policy or procedures.

However, in the first instance, when the complaint is easily resolved in a telephone call, a brief note in the school's/principal's/teacher's diary recording the issue and the resolution may be all that is required.

The school council should regularly review its policy and procedures to effectively address parent concerns and complaints as part of its cyclic policy and procedures review schedule.

This policy is to be read in conjunction with:

- Shoalhaven Region Anglican Schools Grievance Procedures
- Shoalhaven Region Anglican Schools Communication Policy
- Shoalhaven Region Anglican Schools Child Protection Policy
- Sydney Anglican Schools Corporation Communication Policy