



## THE ANGLICAN SCHOOLS CORPORATION

### COMPLAINTS HANDLING POLICY 2016

*(approved 29 March 2016 – Governance Committee resolution no. G16/31)*

#### 1. LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

This Complaints Handling Policy outlines how the Corporation complies with the requirements of legislation and related government agencies' requirements. The introduction of the 2014 Privacy Laws in Australia requires schools to develop and implement an appropriate complaints handling process in relation to the collection, use and disclosure of personal information.

#### 2. DEFINITIONS

*ISO 10002-2014 Complaints Handling Standard* (the Standard) defines a “**complaint**” as an “expression of dissatisfaction made to an organization, related to its products, or the complaints handling process itself, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected”.

The person making a complaint is referred to as the ‘**complainant**’. The person about whom the complaint is made is the ‘**respondent**’. The ‘**parties**’ refer to both complainant and respondent. The person handling the complaint is the ‘**complaint manager**’, usually a Principal, Director or Manager. Persons who directly witness an alleged incident are referred to as ‘**witnesses**’.

#### 3. POLICY SCOPE

This policy outlines a framework for staff of the Corporation (and, as applicable, members of committees of the Corporation) to respond where students, parents, customers, contractors, local residents, visitors and others have a complaint (excluding issues raised by staff within schools).

Exceptions include specific issues that are dealt in accordance with:

- Student Suspension, Transfer, Expulsion, Exclusion Procedures;
- Child Protection – Risk of Harm and Significant Harm **and /or** Allegations (notify the Principal immediately);
- Student Bullying; and
- Criminal Jurisdictions.

#### **4. OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of this policy are to establish an effective complaints handling program to:

- ensure compliance with legal obligations;
- facilitate identification of real problems that must be resolved;
- empower staff by giving them a clear path to resolve issues in a consistent, systematic and responsive way;
- facilitate continual improvement of internal systems and controls; and
- provide information with respect to potential risks.

#### **5. PRINCIPLES:**

Complaints handling policy and procedures need to be documented, taking into account any relevant statutory and regulatory requirements, so that they can be effectively communicated and made available to relevant parties.

##### **5.1 Visibility and Accessible**

Information about how and where to complain, and how the complaints process works is to be visible, well publicised and effectively communicated to key stakeholders. The Complaints Handling Policy and Procedures needs to be accessible such as clearly positioned on the School and Corporation's website. It should be easy to understand how to make a complaint and make provision for both verbal and written methods to be accessible.

##### **5.2 Resource Allocation**

Resources will be required to be allocated to document, establish and maintain the complaints program. This may involve the use of computer software to capture and manage complaints. The benefit of using software to capture complaints is that it enhances a school's ability to analyse data and to provide reports to management that aid their decision-making processes.

##### **5.3 Training**

All staff may require training regarding how to identify a complaint, when a complaint can be managed informally and when it requires escalation to a nominated "complaint manager". Additional training may be required for those people who are responsible for managing escalated complaints.

##### **5.4 Responsible Person Allocated to Manage Complaints**

In general, the Principal is ultimately responsible for managing and resolving escalated complaints, and may nominate a Deputy Principal or another member of staff who has not been involved, to investigate, as appropriate. A responsible person should be allocated responsibility for managing escalated complaints to a responsible person.

School Councils are not generally responsible for dealing with complaints.

Complaints received by staff at Group Office will generally be referred to the Principal of the school to which the complaint relates. Complaints relating to Group Office will generally be referred to the Chief Executive Officer.

The involvement of the Board of Sydney Anglican Schools Corporation in the addressing of a complaint is normally only applicable to situations concerning a complaint that is related to a Principal, or a member of a School Council, which, in the first instance should be made to the Chair of the School Council. The involvement of the Board in such matters is typically via the Chief Executive Officer, who will act as the Board's representative, as appropriate.

## **6. MANAGING A COMPLAINT**

### **6.1 'Capturing' a Complaint**

'Capturing' a complaint is not as easy as it may first seem. This really comes down to ensuring that all staff understand what a complaint is (and is not). This involves having a clear definition of the word "complaint". If the definition from the Standard is adopted this means that any issue raised that is an "expression of dissatisfaction, related to services, or the complaints-handling process itself, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected" should be considered a complaint and managed in accordance with the complaints handling procedures.

### **6.2 Acknowledging a Complaint**

Once a complaint is received it should be acknowledged as a complaint. This does not mean every complaint requires a formal written acknowledgement. Complaints of a less serious nature (which are most complaints) can be acknowledged verbally and resolved without the need for a formal investigation or indeed a written response. The key is that staff may need to be trained as to how to effectively manage this process.

Generally it is only more serious complaints that require formal acknowledgment, investigation and responses. Often during the acknowledgement phase the complainant may be provided with a document that provides an overview of the complaints handling process in order to clearly establish expectations at an early stage of the process.

### **6.3 Tracking**

Notwithstanding the fact that a complaint is informal or less serious in nature, it should be recorded on a school's complaints register. This is because many informal complaints received over time may indicate a systemic issue which, if not resolved, can lead to dissatisfaction amongst key stakeholders such as parents or students.

More serious complaints of course not only need to be recorded but the progress in resolving the complaint needs to be tracked and carefully monitored. This is especially so where a school has represented that it will respond to a complaint within certain timeframe.

Tracking of complaints, usually through the allocation of a complaints status (e.g. new complaint, under investigation, resolved etc.), also provides valuable information for school management to assist them in identifying risks and enhanced decision making.

### **6.4 Responsiveness**

Responsiveness is another key principle of complaints management. This includes effective acknowledgment as well as the establishment of clear timelines for investigating and responding to more serious complaints.

### **6.5 Objectivity**

Each complaint should be addressed in an equitable, objective and unbiased manner. This requires ensuring procedural fairness or natural justice during the complaints handling process.

### **6.6 Confidentiality**

Finally, any personally identifiable information concerning the complainant should only be used for the purpose of addressing the complaint. Information with respect to the complaint must remain confidential and only be disclosed to staff on a need to know basis.

## **7. RECORD KEEPING, REPORTING & CORRECTIVE ACTION**

### **7.1 Record Keeping**

Records should be kept of every complaint including records of the description of the complaint, supporting documents if any, immediate action taken, records relating to the investigation, including witness statements if any, etc.

### **7.2 Complaints Register**

All complaints should be recorded on a complaints register, classified and analysed to identify systemic, recurring and single incident problems and trends in order to identify key risk areas and help eliminate the underlying causes of complaints through corrective actions.

### **7.3 Management Reporting**

Governors and senior management team should receive regular reports with respect to the status of existing complaints, any underlying statistical trends, as well as information with respect to corrective actions that have been put in place.

## **8. RELATED LEGISLATION, DOCUMENTS AND WEBSITE REFERENCES:**

- Australian Privacy Principles 2014
- BOSTES Registration and Accreditation Manual for Non-Government Schools
- ISO 10002-2014 Complaints Handling Standard
- Ombudsman Act 1974 (as amended from time to time)
- Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998 (as amended from time to time)
- Child and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998
- Child Protection (Offenders Registration) Act 2000
- NSW Commission for Children and Young People – Website: [www.kids.nsw.gov.au](http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au)
- Child Protection (Working With Children) Act 2012 and Regulations 2013

## **9. POLICY REVIEW**

Regular review requires continual improvement of a school's complaints handling process. The policy shall be reviewed every three years or in the event of any information, incident legislative changes or organisational practice that would demonstrate the need for a review.

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