





Student Complaints Policy

	Ratified by Council	Reviewed by Principal
Date	23 May 2023	23 May 2023
Name	Justin Coombs	Jenny Dougan
Signature		

West Coast Steiner School is committed to being a Child Safe Organisation, taking a preventative and participatory stance on child protection issues and promoting a child safe environment based on the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations.

PROVENANCE		
Responsibility: School Principal	Review Cycle: 2 years	Date for Next Review: May 2025
Related Policies and Procedures	Child Protection Policy Code of Conduct for Staff Code of Conduct for Parents Duty of Care Policy Privacy Policy Pastoral Care Policy Communication Guidelines Concerns and Complaints Management (Parents, Community, Staff) Policy Behaviour Development Policy Bullying Prevention Policy	
Relevant Legislation and Authority	School Education Act 1999 School Education Regulations 2000 Privacy Act 2020 Working with Children Act 1988 Children and Community Services Act 2004 National Principles for Child Safe Organisations	
Appendices	Appendix A: Student Complaints Procedure Appendix B: Student Complaint Form Appendix C: Student Survey	

VERSION MANAGEMENT		
Date	Changes Made	Author
May 2018	Student Concerns and Complaints Policy ratified by Council	A Gernaat
December 2020	Reviewed with AISWA Concerns, Complaints and Disputes Guideline Version 8 updated September 2020	L Lane
January 2023	Rewritten as Students Complaints Policy in line with National Principles for Child Safe Organisations and the National Office for Child Safety Complaint Handling Guide: upholding the rights of children and young people,	L Lane
May 2023	Ratified by Council	L Lane

Policy

Background

West Coast Steiner School is committed to providing a child safe, supportive and engaging learning environment, where our students are happy, confident to speak up and feel heard and valued. Empowering children and young people to understand their rights and responsibilities, to raise matters of concern and to effectively support them to address the issues raised, is key in meeting this commitment. As such we welcome students to share their concerns and complaints with the understanding that they will be taken seriously by staff who have appropriate training, using processes that ensure that such matters are dealt with effectively.

Our approach and procedures in addressing student complaints are aligned with Standards 6 and 9 of The National Principles for Child Safe Organisations, as required by the Registration Standards for Non-Government Schools. These principles set out a nationally consistent approach to promoting a culture of child safety and wellbeing within organisations.

Parents may wish to raise issues on behalf of their children, and should always discuss any concern related to their child or children with their child's teacher as soon as possible and follow the procedures set down in the School's *Concerns and Complaints Management Policy (Parents, Community and Staff) Policy*, available from Reception or on the School's website. There are other concerns or problems which students may choose to raise on their own behalf, and which are best raised by them through the process outlined in this policy.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy and associated procedures is to provide an outline of the complaints process at West Coast Steiner School so that members of our community are informed of how students can raise complaints or concerns about issues arising at our school. This policy provides a framework for a transparent and equitable process which enables student concerns to be addressed as quickly and as thoroughly as possible, and in a manner which ensures mutual respect and procedural fairness.

West Coast Steiner School has zero tolerance of child abuse and explicitly forbids the use of any form of corporal punishment or other degrading punishment, as defined in our *Child Protection Policy*. We will always give priority to any complaints involving the safety and well-being of students. All concerns and complaints are taken seriously and treated as constructive suggestions that can facilitate improvement, and where appropriate, we will collaborate and consult with students to review and improve our complaints management process.

Application

This policy applies to and is binding upon all students, parents, employees, work experience students, volunteers and contractors of West Coast Steiner School. For the purpose of this policy 'parent' includes step-parents, foster parents, legal guardians, carers and grandparents.

Definitions

Procedural fairness is about the fairness of the process used to reach a decision. Procedural Fairness as set out in the Registration Standards for Non-Government Schools requires:

- A. A hearing appropriate to the circumstances
- B. Lack of bias
- C. Evidence to support a decision
- D. Inquiry into matters in dispute.

Implementation

What is a Complaint?

A complaint can be considered as 'an expression of dissatisfaction made to the School about its services, decisions, actions or those of its staff, or about the complaint management process itself.' Whereas, a concern may be defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'.

For the purposes of this policy and for ease of understanding for children, the terms 'complaint' and 'concern' may be used interchangeably and can be raised about the School as a whole, a specific department in the School, about a particular school activity, a school facility, about an individual member of staff, about one or more students, or about another member of the School community.

Guidelines for Managing Concerns and Complaints

West Coast Steiner School understands that issues or concerns can cause stress or worry for students and impact their wellbeing and learning. We encourage our students to raise concerns or complaints as they arise so that we can work together to resolve them. Often student complaints will be brought directly to the teacher and can be resolved informally. In such instances, teachers exercise their professional judgement based on their professional knowledge, training and experience, and supported by their understanding of the School's policies and procedures. Other complaints may require a more formal approach to manage and resolve the problem. Our child-friendly Students Complaints Procedure (*Appendix A*) is displayed in classrooms and Reception to assist students with this process.

In all instances the following principles underpin the management of complaints:

- The School values feedback and encourages an openness to hearing concerns and complaints
- Emphasis should be on early intervention, effective management and resolution
- Those wishing to make a complaint know how to do so
- Complaints are dealt with as quickly as possible and those involved are kept informed of progress
- Complaints are dealt with fairly and thoroughly
- All relevant information is collected and all sides considered without prejudgement of the outcome, the complainant or the subject of the complaint
- Complaints are managed in a sensitive, culturally safe manner - access to support will be provided if required
- Confidentiality is respected and maintained so far as is possible
- All legislative and mandatory reporting obligations concerning complaints or allegations of grooming or child abuse are adhered to
- Records are maintained and securely filed.

How to Raise a Concern or Complaint

Students can share a concern or complaint at School by:

- discussing issues and problems in their class sharing circles
- talking to a Student Councillor about their concern and any suggestions for resolving it
- participating in the Rainbow Club (support group for LGBTQIA+ students, family and friends)
- speaking with a staff member at School with whom they feel comfortable, but ideally with their teacher in the first instance
- completing a Student Complaint Form (*Appendix B*) in Reception
- writing a note for our Suggestion Box in Reception, which can be done anonymously if preferred
- participating in our biennial West Coast Steiner School Student Survey (*Appendix C*).

Resolving a Concern or Complaint

The School will promptly acknowledge the complaint and assign a staff member to manage the complaint process.

Students will be made aware that some complaints can be resolved quite quickly and simply through talking it over, being open to a Restorative Conversation or through a straightforward plan of action being agreed upon. Other problems may need a more formal or longer investigation before it can be resolved. Procedural fairness will be applied to any formal inquiry or investigation into a complaint.

Complaints made by students or involving students must be managed with support for the student and with a focus on ensuring student safety and wellbeing. Wherever possible complaint management should include student participation ensuring students are informed of their rights and empowered to participate in decisions affecting them.

Students will also be advised on the provision of confidentiality of the complaint, as well as being made aware of the limits of confidentiality as the process progresses. Students will be kept informed of the progress of their complaint.

The School will decide if a student's parents are to be informed or involved and at what point in the process this should take place, as is appropriate.

In situations where it is believed to be in the best interest of the student's welfare and safety to refer the matter on to an external authority, a member of staff will, at an appropriate time, explain this to the student. It is very important this situation is handled sensitively and in a supportive manner and that the staff member follows the relevant School's policies on *Child Protection*, *Critical Incident and Emergency Management*, *Bullying Prevention* and *Duty of Care* and fulfils all applicable legal obligations.

Resolution of a complaint may come from any of the following:

- feeling that the complaint has been considered seriously
- knowing that the School is now alert to a possible problem
- knowing that changes have been made and that matters will be different in the future
- an outcome which may be different to what was sought, but which is seen as well-considered and fair
- an apology.

Once the matter is resolved, the outcome will be discussed with the student/s by a member of staff, explaining how and why a decision was made. It should be noted that in some situations students may not receive explicit information on what action has been taken. A written record may be shared to help the student's understanding, if appropriate.

If the issue is unable to be resolved, the student raising the complaint is encouraged to speak with their parents or an advocate, should they not have previously done so, and may forward a written complaint to the Principal.

The Chair of School Council will handle a complaint lodged against the Principal.

Who Else Can Help?

Students can also ask a parent, carer or another trusted adult outside of the School, to talk to us about an issue instead. The procedure for then reporting such a concern or complaint can be found in the School's *Concerns and Complaints Management Policy (Parents, Community and Staff) Policy*.

Students can receive additional support from the School Counsellor on the recommendation of teaching staff.

Further information and resources to support students to raise issues or concerns are available at Kids Helpline (call 1800 55 1800).

Any student, parent or community member is entitled to contact the Director General with concerns about how the School has dealt with a complaint. The Director General of the Department of Education is responsible for ensuring that the School observes the registration standards, including the standard about its complaints handling system. While the Director General may consider whether the School has breached the registration standards, the Director General does not have power to intervene in a complaint or override the School's decision. Information is available on the Department of Education website <https://www.education.wa.edu.au/non-government-school-concerns>

Complaints Involving Grooming, Child Abuse and Breaches of the School's Codes of Conduct

In circumstances involving a complaint or allegation of grooming, child abuse and breaches of the School's Codes of Conduct, the School will act in the best interests of the student and in accordance with the Registration Standards for Non-Government Schools July 2022, Standard 10 Preventing and Responding to Child Abuse, which states that a school must:

- inform the complainant about the services, including advocacy and support services, which may be available.
- report the matter promptly to the responsible government authorities and their direction is sought and complied with as to when, what and by whom information related to the matter and its investigation may be given to the person against whom the complaint or allegation is made, the complainant and his or her parents/guardian, other affected students and their parents and guardians, and the wider school community.
- ensure its records of complaints, allegations and findings related to grooming and child abuse, whether involving former or current staff or students:
 - contain as much detail as possible;
 - are stored securely; and
 - are not destroyed without the approval of the Director General or, where their retention becomes impracticable or unduly onerous, are forwarded to the Director General with her permission for retention in accordance with the State Records Act 2000.

Accountability

Information related to student complaints and how the School manages them is made available to students and/or the West Coast Steiner School community through:

- Parent Information Evenings
- Newsletters
- Student Assemblies
- Class discussion of complaints management in the development of Class Agreements
- Protective Behaviours lessons and other aspects of the School's curriculum.

In order for all staff, including support staff, to know how to carry out their responsibilities in relation to this Policy, appropriate training is provided to staff by the School during their Staff Induction, as well as various training opportunities throughout the year.

The complaint processes are reviewed regularly as part of the monthly report the Principal makes to School Council. A Concerns and Complaints Dashboard is created to analyse trends and gain insights in order to improve performance and reduce the number of complaints received. Where potential system improvements are identified, such feedback shall be provided to relevant areas of the School through Faculty Meetings or the School Newsletter.

The Student Complaints Policy is reviewed every two years in time with the West Coast Steiner School Student Survey, to allow relevant student feedback to be included in the review, unless an earlier review of our processes is required following a significant event or following on from the findings of the report to School Council.

Record Keeping

The School will maintain clear, confidential records of complaints and the actions taken. Teachers are expected to keep their own records of complaints made by students to them as required by the Code of Conduct for Staff. Such records should contain the following information:

- date when the issue was raised
- name of the student
- brief statement of issue
- simple but clear notes of all conversations about any source of dissatisfaction
- brief statement of outcome.

Significant and/or ongoing concerns and complaints must be raised with the Principal or Deputy Principal for recording in the Concerns and Complaints Register. The Concerns and Complaints Register captures the following information:

- date of complaint
- name of complainant and relationship to the School
- subject matter of the complaint, including the name of any person complained about and their relationship to the School
- complaint investigator and position or role at the School
- method of resolution
- whether complaint upheld, resolution agreed with or offered to complainant
- identifiers for the level and category of the concern or complaint
- whether the complaint or concern is open or closed.

Policy Review and Dissemination

This policy and related procedures will be made available to the public and staff on the School website and is available to staff in the Policies and Procedures folder in Reception. The School Community will receive reminders to refer to this policy (and updated versions) through the School Newsletter.

All staff will be directed to read this document at the first staff meeting at the commencement of the school year. New staff will be informed of this policy as part of the School's Induction Program. The School will provide ongoing training to ensure that all staff members understand their responsibilities in relation to this policy.

The School may, at any time, make amendments to this policy to ensure continuous improvement. The policy will be reviewed at least once every two years by the School Principal and ratified by the School Council.

Student Complaints Procedure



What if I have a problem or want to make a complaint?

If you have a problem with something that happened, or is happening, at School

or

If you don't feel safe or are being hurt

or

If you're unhappy with the way you, or another person, are being treated

You have a right to ask for help or complain about it.

Be brave and share your concerns with us!

Step 1: Find support

- This could be a Year 6 Student Councillor or your teacher, the duty teacher or another adult at School you trust.
- Go to Reception and ask to see Vanessa (Deputy Principal) or Jenny (the Principal)
- A parent, carer or friend can also help you make a complaint.

Step 2: Tell your support person or write it down

- Tell them why you're not happy, how the problem makes you feel, what would help to fix it.
- Sometimes it's easier to write things than say them out loud. You can write a letter or draw a picture.
- You can fill in a Student Complaint Form available from Reception. Emma or someone in Reception can help with this and give your complaint to Vanessa (Deputy Principal) or Jenny (the Principal).

Making your complaint

Be brave and try your best.

It is okay to ask for help and it is okay to ask questions.

Remember you're trying to do the right thing to help yourself or someone else, or to fix a problem. You will not be in trouble for speaking up.

Will you keep what I have told you private?

We will keep your information private. Private means we will keep your details safe. Sometimes we may need to share certain information with other adults who can help sort out the problem.

What will happen next?

We will listen, write down what you tell us, and try to fix it. After we talk to you, we may need to find out more about what happened.

We will tell you how long this will take and what will happen next.

We will let you know when we have finished looking into your complaint and explain what we're going to do.

Adults should always listen, answer your questions and treat you with respect.

STUDENT COMPLAINT FORM



All concerns, large or small, are important and we want to hear from you, especially if you are feeling unsafe, hurt, or are not liking the way you are being treated.

1. Fill in the Student Complaint Form at Reception.
2. Reception will give the form to Vanessa or Jenny.
3. We will investigate your complaint as quickly and sensitively as possible.
4. Someone will speak with you to discuss your complaint and what happens next.

Your Full Name: _____

Your Class: _____ Date: _____

Describe your problem/complaint. Think about what happened and who was involved.....
(There is space on the back of the page if you need to keep writing or wish to draw a picture to help explain)

Where and when did this happen?














































Have you told your problem to anyone else? No/Yes, the person is _____

How would you like to see the problem or complaint sorted out?

Do you have any questions?

Appendix C: Student Survey

WCSS Student Survey – 2020

1. I like being a student at this school.			
2. I feel safe at our school.			
3. I feel accepted by other students at our school.			
4. I have good friends at our school.			
5. I am a good friend to others.			
6. Our school takes children's opinions seriously.			
7. At our school children are well-behaved.			
8. Our school encourages me to be a good community member.			
9. I learn interesting things at school.			
10. Our school is clean and well looked after.			
11. My reading and writing are improving.			
12. My maths is improving.			
13. My teachers care about me.			
14. My teachers make lessons interesting.			
15. This is a good school. I would recommend it to my friends.			
What are the best things about our school?			
If one thing could improve at our school, what would it be?			