



## Policy Statement

DOBCEL is committed to promoting a respectful, safe and supportive learning environment characterised by tolerance and support; and one which also respects the principle of right relationship where people have a healthy respect for the dignity of each other.

Part of this commitment involves ensuring the DOBCEL school community has access to processes that allow for grievances to be managed appropriately, promptly, respectfully and fairly.

## Context

This policy provides clear and transparent information about how a parent, student or other member of the school community (other than a staff member) can raise grievances with DOBCEL including when seeking a review of the management of a grievance by a DOBCEL school - and outlines how such grievances and requests for review will be managed and resolved by DOBCEL.

DOBCEL treats seriously all grievances. The aim is to ensure that grievances are handled objectively and with sensitivity. In doing so, DOBCEL will seek to identify both the specific and (where applicable) systemic issues raised by a grievance (thereby enabling future improvements to be identified and implemented).

All DOBCEL schools are empowered to manage grievances at the school level where appropriate. Each DOBCEL school is required to have in place a Grievance Policy (Community). There is accordingly an expectation that grievances escalated to the DOBCEL Office have been managed in the first instance in accordance with the individual school level policy. The procedural steps outlined in this policy are intended to be practical, non-adversarial and non-legal. Steps will be implemented flexibly at the DOBCEL Office's discretion, depending on the circumstances of each situation.

## Scope

This policy applies to all DOBCEL Office staff, the staff of DOBCEL system schools (including employees, contractors, volunteers, labour hire workers, secondees) and visitors, parents/guardians, students and other members of the DOBCEL community.

This policy does not apply to:

- employee grievances, which should be raised in accordance with the DOBCEL Grievance Policy (Staff)
- student grievances, which should be raised in accordance with the DOBCEL school's Grievance Policy (Student)
- concerns about child abuse and reportable conduct, which will be addressed in accordance with DOBCEL PROTECT Reportable Conduct Scheme Policy
- legal matters, including requests for compensation, payment and redress.

To the extent that there are any inconsistencies between this policy and other grievance policies and appendices, other than the DOBCEL Protect Reportable Conduct Policy, this policy shall prevail.

## Guiding Principles

When raising a grievance with DOBCEL, a member of the school community can expect to:

- be treated with respect and courtesy
- have their grievance taken seriously, considered impartially (with consideration of any power imbalances), and dealt with on the merits
- have their grievance dealt with in a confidential and timely manner
- have access to appropriate and easily understandable information regarding the grievance resolution process being followed by DOBCEL (including this policy and the local DOBCEL school's Grievance Policy (Community))
- be supported by the DOBCEL Office and local DOBCEL school during the grievance handling process, with a focus on maintaining the emotional wellbeing of any students involved
- be kept informed of the progress and outcome of the grievance
- not be victimised, or subjected to reprisal, for raising grievances in good faith.

In return, DOBCEL expects that a member of the school community who raises a grievance will:

- have first raised the grievance with the relevant DOBCEL school and attempted to resolve the issue in accordance with the local DOBCEL school's Grievance Policy (Community)
- treat others (including the DOBCEL Office staff, school staff, students and parents, both former and present) with respect and courtesy
- raise grievances in the appropriate forum and as soon as possible after the event giving rise to the grievance has occurred, having regard to the below framework
- provide complete and factual information about the grievance
- ask for assistance or further information as needed
- act in good faith to achieve a reasonable outcome
- be understanding and accepting of any outcome reached, being mindful that the DOBCEL Office and schools must sometimes manage the interests of a number of students and other individuals when making decisions and may be privy to confidential information not known to the person raising the grievance.

DOBCEL entrusts Principals to manage the day-to-day operations of schools and they are afforded significant discretion in relation to staffing and student matters. Accordingly, subject to any legal obligations and rights which may otherwise apply, operational decisions made by the Principal of a school will usually be considered final. A further review by the DOBCEL Office should be a last resort.

Our aim is for the prompt resolution of concerns.

Timeframes listed in this policy are a guide and in reality can vary due to the nature of the grievance and surrounding circumstances. Where timeframes set out in this policy cannot be met, the DOBCEL Office will strive to communicate with the affected parties about the status of the grievance, and the steps taken (or to be taken) to progress a resolution.

## Framework

The DOBCEL framework for dealing with grievances involves a three-step process, namely:

**Stage 1** - A concern is raised directly with the DOBCEL school (in line with the local DOBCEL school's Grievance Policy (Community)).

**Stage 2** - A formal complaint is made to the Principal of the DOBCEL school (in line with the local DOBCEL school's Grievance Policy (Community)).

**Stage 3** - A further review by the DOBCEL Office can be requested if a complainant is not satisfied that their formal complaint has been adequately resolved by the local DOBCEL school's Principal in line with local DOBCEL school's Grievance Policy (Community).

## Recommendations for initially raising concerns with a DOBCEL school (Stage 1)

In the first instance, the complainant should raise their concerns directly with the relevant school. A school must be aware of a concern and of its substance in order to address it.

DOBCEL believes that a concern is best resolved closest to its source. A member of the school community who wishes to escalate a complaint to the DOBCEL Office is required to have followed the relevant school's policy and procedures in the first instance and demonstrated evidence to that effect.

The following considerations are relevant to the person raising the concern prior to, and when initially raising a concern with the relevant school:

- clearly identify the issue or problem prior to contacting the school
- decide whether the issue or problem is in the nature of a complaint, concern, enquiry or suggestion. This will help in finding a solution.
- identify the party or parties involved
- consider the practical outcome trying to be achieved (while being realistic and open to other outcomes and solutions)
- if there is more than one issue or problem, write a list to adequately prepare and prioritise issues in order of importance
- remain courteous and calm when conveying the concerns. The school (and the DOBCEL office) are within their rights to terminate a conversation with a person raising the concern until such time that a courteous and calm conversation can continue.

## Confidentiality

Appropriate confidentiality will be always maintained by DOBCEL when dealing with a grievance, with information being provided only to those who have a right or need to know. Despite this, there will often be occasions where it is necessary for the DOBCEL Office to confer with the relevant school the subject of a grievance.

## Communication

This policy is available to parents, students and the school community via DOBCEL's website.

## Withdrawal of a Grievance

A grievance can be withdrawn at any stage during the processes outlined in this policy. A grievance can only be withdrawn by the person who raised the grievance with the DOBCEL Office.

Ideally, all grievances should be retracted in writing. However, a dated notation on DOBCEL's systems, stating the grievance has been withdrawn verbally by the appropriate person can be made by a relevant DOBCEL Office staff member responsible for managing the grievance.

Where considered appropriate, the DOBCEL Office will notify affected parties if a grievance is withdrawn.

Regardless of a person's wish to withdraw a grievance, complaints that have disciplinary implications for a member of staff may still be followed up by the DOBCEL Office.

## Anonymous Grievances

DOBCEL is committed to dealing with grievances in accordance with the processes outlined in this policy. DOBCEL understands that in some cases, complainants would prefer to remain anonymous and not put a name to their grievances.

DOBCEL treats grievances about a student's education, enrolment, safety and wellbeing with the utmost importance and will investigate such grievances to the fullest extent practicable. Anonymous grievances are discouraged as anonymity can make it difficult for DOBCEL to effectively resolve grievances (particularly where DOBCEL is being asked to accept an anonymous source's version of events).

## Previously Addressed, Stale or Vexatious Grievances

Grievances that have been previously addressed by the DOBCEL Office or externally, or which were not raised with the DOBCEL school within a reasonable period of time (having regard to the nature of the relevant grievance), will not be considered in the absence of highly relevant new information and/or evidence coming to light.

DOBCEL does not tolerate vexatious grievances.

## External Grievances and Redress

DOBCEL acknowledges that grievances relating to a DOBCEL school can also be made to an external body or be the subject of legal action. However, DOBCEL encourages its community to raise any grievances, and work to resolve such matters, in accordance with the procedures outlined in this policy.

## Grievances relating to the Executive Director

Grievances relating to the Executive Director should be made in writing to the Board Chair via [chair@dobcel.org.au](mailto:chair@dobcel.org.au)

## SCHEDULE 1

### DOBCEL Grievance Resolution Procedures (Community)

#### Stage 1: Raise the concern with the DOBCEL school

Refer to the local DOBCEL school's Grievance Policy (Community)

#### Stage 2: Make a complaint to the DOBCEL school's Principal

Refer to the local DOBCEL school's Grievance Policy (Community)

#### Stage 3: Request a Review by the DOBCEL Office

Step 1	Request a review by the DOBCEL Office	<p>If a complainant is not satisfied that their formal complaint has been adequately resolved by the local DOBCEL school's Principal in line with local DOBCEL school's Grievance Policy (Community), they may request a review by the DOBCEL Office, preferably in writing via the Feedback Webform at <a href="#">[Complaints Web Form]</a> or by post at 200 Gillies St, Lake Wendouree, 3350.</p> <p>Requests for review must be made within fifteen (15) business days, where practicable, of the date the Principal communicated the outcome of the complaint in writing. The grounds for the review, and in particular any concerns a complainant may have with why they believe an error has been made in relation to the implementation of the policy or procedures by the local DOBCEL school, must be clearly identified in the request for review.</p>
Step 2	Review	<p>Please note DOBCEL entrusts local DOBCEL school Principals with the day-to-day management of their school, and in particular its staff and students. The Principal is accorded significant discretion regarding such matters.</p> <p>Accordingly, any review of the Principal's decision under this policy will be confined to the DOBCEL Office deciding whether there is evidence that the local DOBCEL school's policy and procedures have not been followed or that the Principal unreasonably exercised his or her discretion.</p> <p>The DOBCEL Office may delegate parts of the review, or seek the assistance of third parties, however any ultimate decision will still be made by the delegate of the Executive Director.</p>
Step 3	Outcome	<p>The DOBCEL Office will aim to communicate the outcome of a request for review in writing within forty-five (45) business days where practicable.</p>

## Legislative Context

Ministerial Order No. 1359 – Implementing the Child Safe Standards – Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools and School Boarding Premises

Guidelines to the Minimum Standards and Requirements for School Registration

Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005

## Supporting Documentation

### Related DOBCEL policies

Grievance Policy (Community) [School]

Grievance Procedures (Community) [School]

Parents/Guardians/Carers Code of Conduct [School]

PROTECT Identifying & Responding to Abuse - Reporting Obligations Policy [DOBCEL]

PROTECT Reportable Conduct Scheme Policy [DOBCEL]

Whistleblower Policy

## DOBCEL Principles of Governance

All DOBCEL policies are founded on and reflect the Principles of Governance stated in the Document:

[DOBCEL Principles of Governance](#)

Policy Category	Governance
Responsible Directorate member	Deputy Director: Stewardship
Policy Owner	Deputy Director: Stewardship
Assigned Board Committee	Assurance & Risk
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