



# Complaints Handling Policy and Procedures

## **Introduction**

We are committed to complying with our Complaints Handling requirements.

## **Purpose and Objectives**

The School welcomes feedback from all members of the School community and takes all complaints or concerns that may be raised seriously. The Complaints Handling Policy and Procedures are designed to assist you to understand how to make a complaint.

## **Scope**

This Policy and its procedures apply to all staff, volunteers and contractors at the school.

## **Responsibilities**

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Policy

It is the Policy of the school to aim to resolve complaints and grievances within the school fairly and to benefit the welfare of the students. This policy is published on the school website.

Complaints and allegations of staff misconduct or reportable conduct are managed separately from other complaints. Refer to the section at the end of this Policy and Procedures - Complaints and Allegations of Staff Misconduct or Reportable Conduct for more information.

## **Aetaomah School's Commitment**

Aetaomah School is committed to handling complaints effectively and efficiently. To manage complaints effectively, we have established a Complaints Handling Program in line with:

- the international complaints handling standard (ISO 10002:2018 Quality management – Customer satisfaction – Guidelines for complaints handling in organizations)
- the Australian/New Zealand complaints handling standard (AS/NZS 10002:2014 Guidelines for complaint management in organisations)
- the Australian Privacy Principles (APP).

Our internal complaints handling process is available at no cost.

Our complaints handling procedures include the establishment of an online complaints management system which allows us to effectively capture, manage and report on complaints. Regular analysis of complaints received and the implementation of rectification action, where deficiencies are identified, are key to the Aetaomah School's commitment.

Complaints may be made anonymously or using a pseudonym. If you choose to do so, we will be unable to provide you with feedback on the progress and outcome of your complaint. It may also limit our ability to fully investigate the complaint if we are unable to contact you to obtain further details.

### Confidentiality

Confidentiality applies to both information relating to the person making the complaint, and, if relevant, to a person against whom a complaint is made. The Aetaomah School is committed to maintaining the confidentiality of information throughout the complaints process.

Personally identifiable information about a complainant will only be used for the purpose of addressing the complaint and (unless the complainant consents) will be actively protected from disclosure.

### **Procedures**

#### Informal Complaints Resolution

The vast majority of issues causing concern in schools can be handled quickly and in an informal manner. In most cases these issues can be resolved through informal discussions with appropriate staff members.

Even if an issue can be resolved informally, staff are requested to log issues through our Complaints Handling Form, so we can identify any systemic issues arising and take appropriate rectification action.

#### How do I make a formal complaint?

We ask that, where appropriate, you first raise the matter directly with the relevant staff member. If you have been unable to resolve a matter informally, or simply wish to make a formal complaint you can do so by any of the following means:

1. Sending an email to [contact@aetaomah.nsw.edu.au](mailto:contact@aetaomah.nsw.edu.au)
2. Writing a letter to the Aetaomah School addressed to “The Principal”
3. Telephoning the Aetaomah School and asking to speak to the Principal

All formal complaints will be logged into our online complaints management system and managed in accordance with the following procedure.

#### Complaints and Allegations of Staff Misconduct or Reportable Conduct

Complaints and allegations of staff misconduct and/or reportable conduct are managed by the Aetaomah School in a different manner from other complaints. This is because the Aetaomah School has legal obligations to report certain staff conduct to external authorities. Staff misconduct is a broad term that could include breaches of professional boundaries, codes of conduct or standards of behaviour, whereas reportable conduct is a term defined in law and includes:

- any sexual offence or sexual misconduct, committed against, with or in the presence of a child (including child pornography offences, sexual touching or an offence involving child abuse material) including grooming behaviours
- any assault, ill-treatment or neglect of a child
- any behaviour that causes psychological harm to a child (whether or not, in any case, with the consent of the child).

If your complaint relates to alleged staff misconduct or reportable conduct, please make your complaint to the the Principal, or if this person is the subject of your complaint, please notify the board member ([margo@aetaomah.nsw.edu.au](mailto:margo@aetaomah.nsw.edu.au)).

For more information about Aetaomah School’s complaints handling procedures regarding allegations of staff misconduct or reportable conduct, please refer to our Procedures for Handling Allegations of Staff Misconduct and Reportable Conduct document available on our public website.

#### Our Internal Complaints Handling Process

*Step 1* - All formal complaints are logged through our complaints management system where they are screened by the Principal, or in the case of complaints against the Principal by the board member (email [margo@aetaomah.nsw.edu.au](mailto:margo@aetaomah.nsw.edu.au)).

*Step 2* – All valid complaints will be acknowledged in writing, as soon as practicable, and allocated a status, priority and target resolution date. It is our policy, where possible, to resolve all disputes within 14 days.

*Step 3* – The Complaints Handling Officer shall conduct an investigation into the issues raised, following principles of procedural fairness, and make a determination.

*Step 4* - Following the determination, if appropriate, the Principal shall formulate a resolution and provide a written response to the complainant (unless the complaint was anonymous). The matter will be closed if this response is accepted.

*Step 5* - If the initial response is not accepted, the matter will be reviewed internally by the Principal or the Principal's delegate, who may seek additional information or submissions from the relevant parties. The Principal or their delegate seek to resolve all disputes within 14 days from the date that the review process is initiated. The matter will be closed if the response of the Principal, or their delegate, is accepted.

*Step 6* - All complaints received will be entered into our Complaints Register and, where appropriate, a corrective action request will be made to address any underlying processes which the complaints investigation revealed may require improvement.

*Step 7* - If the matter remains unresolved and/or the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome or the way the complaint has been managed, the complainant may pursue external resolution alternatives.

### **Procedures**

Lodging a Grievance is a formal feedback mechanism which seeks resolution of a problematic situation. Many problems can be resolved in an informal manner. Efforts to resolve the problem should precede the lodgement of a grievance.

- The first point of complaint or grievance-airing by students or parents is to the class teacher. Most problems are solved at this point. The parents and children are made aware of the process for solving complaints and grievances at the enrolment meeting.
- Where the issue is serious or complex enough the parent will be asked to detail the complaint in writing.
- If a complaint is made against a teacher, the parent is requested to refer directly to the Principal who will assess the complaint in accordance with our Child Protection Policy (In full on Aetaomah's website). Both the complainant and the respondent will receive appropriate information, support and assistance in resolving the grievance. Parties may bring a support person to any interview. No person should be victimised because they raise a complaint or are associated with a grievance.

The school's action following a complaint or allegation

1. The Principal will treat the complaint with respect, sensitivity and confidentiality; and ask you to maintain confidentiality also.

2. The Principal will tell you what is likely to happen next and the expected timeframe.

3. The Principal will report a complaint or allegation of misconduct or reportable conduct against a staff member to one or more of the following agencies: Office of the Children's Guardian (all matters of reportable conduct or misconduct involving staff; the Police (if criminal activity may have occurred). See Aetaomah Child Protection Policy & Procedure.

- If the class teacher is unable to satisfy the complaint he/she will refer it to the Principal or College of Teachers within 24 hours.
- The student or parent may ask for the Principal or College to intervene.
- If no satisfaction is gained or the teacher or principal needs the help or guidance of the whole school he/she will raise the issue with the College of Teachers.
- The class teacher or a delegated person will promptly convey and discuss the College's view or decision with the aggrieved party. All discussions and decisions will be based on procedural fairness as defined in Section 10, Glossary of the Manual.
- If necessary the parents or children will discuss the issue with the College of Teachers.
- Always the aim is to find a fair solution, after all the underlying principle of the school is to uphold the welfare of the students. The process will be based on the principle of procedural fairness.
- Where the problem is complex or could lead to conflict minutes of meetings will be taken for approval by both parties.
- Appropriate action taken includes but is not limited to
- Making enquiries and/or
- Reviewing reasons for administrative action and due process and/or
- Referring the grievance to an appropriate person or entity for a specific purpose and/or

- Conducting an investigation and/or
- Conducting mediation or conciliation and/or
- Engaging in negotiations. A staff member involved in a grievance may wish to exercise their right to consult with, or be represented by their Union representative, or be supported by another staff member. A parent involved in a grievance may wish to exercise their right at any point in the grievance procedure to be supported by a support person of their choice.
- The Principal will ensure that there is an opportunity to present all aspects of the grievance
- If an investigation is conducted, it will be done in a thorough, fair, and impartial manner

Written records will be maintained of all actions in relation to the grievance matter including documentation of the details of the grievance as reported by the aggrieved party, investigations made and findings and decisions taken. A Grievance Register will be held by the Principal containing relevant details of Grievances brought to the College of Teachers. The Register will be held in the Principal's filing cabinet.

- Upon completion of each stage of the grievance, the aggrieved party and the respondent will be informed in writing of the action taken, finding(s) made, and reason(s) for the decision(s) taken.
- This investigation and decision-making stage of the grievance procedure is to be finalised within five (5) working days of the formal grievance unless otherwise agreed.
- The Principal will ensure details of the grievance and the aggrieved parties will remain confidential. Any person with direct or indirect knowledge of the matter is not to discuss the matter with any other person unless given formal authority to do so.
- The College of Teachers will, wherever possible ensure that the aggrieved party suffers no reprisal either from bringing an issue forward or from responding to an issue raised by another relevant party.
- All complaints received will be entered into our Complaints Register and, where appropriate, a corrective action request will be made to address any underlying processes which the complaints investigation revealed may require improvement

- This process is evaluated each year by the College of Teachers or after a serious grievance.

### **Implementation**

The School Governing Authority and authorised delegates share responsibility for the effective implementation of this Policy.

### **Breach of this Policy and Procedures**

This section is not applicable.

### **Definitions**

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Complaint	A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction made to Aetaomah School, related to our services or operations, or the complaints handling process itself, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected.

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### **Source of Obligation**

There are no sources applicable to this Policy.

### **Related Policies and Procedures**

There are no related policies applicable to this Policy.

### **Related Forms and Documents**

There are no additional documents that are related to this Policy and Procedures.

### **References**

There are no applicable references for this Policy.

### **POLICY REVIEW**

Policy Owner: School Board and College of Teachers

Last Review Date: June 2023

Next Review Date: 2024

- This process is evaluated each year by the College of Teachers or after a serious grievance.