

Wellington Christian School Policy



GRIEVANCE

RANGS Reference	3.6.2
Date of Last Review	October 2022
Board approval required	Yes
Owner	Principal

POLICY STATEMENT

Wellington Christian School is committed to helpful communication during the process of raising and resolving concerns, complaints or disputes within all parts of the school community. Prompt and effective resolution of grievances in a Christ-like manner is central to this commitment. Grievances will be treated with due seriousness and resolved in a timely and appropriate manner. The School will provide processes to resolve grievances that are fair and just. Any decisions will be made with impartiality and due care. At all times confidentiality will be respected.

RATIONALE

In a complex community such as our school, relationships can often be tested. This policy, through application of Biblical principles, outlines how grievances are to be dealt with. Grievances are a normal part of life and the aim of this policy is to encourage fair and just procedures outworked in a Christlike manner.

The purpose therefore of this policy is to outline the procedures for lodging a grievance, determining whether a grievance has substance, and the appropriate course of action to be taken, so that positive relationships and unity may be protected within the School community; as well as to ensure conflict is managed and peace making opportunities are maximised.

Complaints and Disagreement:

The manner in which complaints and disagreements are handled can mean the difference between harmony and tension in a community. This policy sets out for parents, employees and others the way to deal with complaints and disagreements consistent with Scripture (Matthew 18:15-17).

All steps must be taken in a true spirit of reconciliation. If a teacher has a complaint about a parent, the same steps may be followed. Complaints should be dealt with promptly and not be allowed to fester. A board member must never be the channel for particular complaints. If parents with a complaint approach any board member, they must always insist that the parent speak with the staff member concerned, and if still not satisfied, then the matter must be taken up with the appropriate senior staff. At all times procedural fairness must be applied. Both parties must be heard, supported and kept informed of progress.

It is important that board and senior staff members are aware of issues that may generate concerns with the educational community. Wise judgement and careful introduction of any changes will help others who have not had the benefit of debate and discussion to see developments in a positive light.

Dealing with Discord:

There is room in the school community for differences: we do not all see things in exactly the same ways (Romans 14:1-15:6). While able to cause tensions, differences need not be threatening. They are often God's way of enriching the school.

All members of the school community are subject to sin (1 John 2:1). There may be times, therefore, when there is discord.

Nevertheless our mutual bond in Christ ensures that we retain a commitment to each other, especially in times of failure and disharmony (1 Cor. 6:1-7, Phil 4:2-3). We recognise, not only that staff, parents and students have shortcomings, but also that sin requires repentance and correction (1 John 1:9).

In accordance with Matthew 18:15 and Luke 17:3b-4, if a disagreement arises between a member of staff and either a parent or another member of staff, the parties involved must first meet together in a spirit of submission to the Lord in an attempt to resolve the matter.

When dealing with any grievance or concern we need to consider biblical principles. Specifically, all parties need to:

- Treat the matter seriously,
- Act fairly towards each other,
- Expect that they will be treated in the same way,
- Treat others involved in the situation with respect,
- Act discreetly and maintain confidentiality. At all times procedural fairness must apply to all parties in a grievance dispute. In all our dealings with parents and students and employees we aim to cover our moral, legal and spiritual responsibilities. In grievance resolution, procedural fairness involves ensuring all facts are heard from both parties, ensuring both parties know how the matter will be resolved and by whom and knowing how to seek a review of a decision. All decisions must be impartial and if this is difficult an outside mediator (eg PeaceWise) should be involved.

SCOPE

Wellington Christian School includes students, parents, staff and other persons with relationship to our school. This Grievance Policy applies to all members of the Wellington Christian School community, unless otherwise provided for. A member of staff, student, parent, carer or member of the public, may lodge a grievance.

DEFINITION

A formal objection or complaint made on the basis of something believed to be wrong, unfair, misleading, unlawful, or of poor quality. A grievance may be about the conduct of a person enrolled at or employed at the school, about specific practices and policies of the school, or about the school generally.

NOTE: Matters of concern or complaint raised that relate to, or may amount to, an allegation of child abuse or significant risk of harm to a child must be dealt with under the provisions of the Wellington Christian School Child Protection Policy. Under this policy, all staff are obliged to report directly to the Principal, any information which is considered reasonable grounds for concern that a child may be at significant risk of harm. This includes knowledge of complaint or allegation of this nature themselves, or any other person.

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1).

God’s act of creation demonstrates His love, sovereignty and our true place in creation. We must be aware of our submission to and relationship with God in all things.

God created people in His own image as the pinnacle of creation (refer Genesis 1:28).

We have some of God’s attributes – the ability to relate and communicate, the ability to create, the ability to reflect and analyse, the ability to rule over the other parts of creation, and the ability to submit to God. Our respect and responsibility for self, others and God’s creation is based on being “in His own image”.

“Sin entered the world through one man [Adam] and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12).

We recognise that sin has affected all of us to some extent. This has damaged relationships with God and with each other. Even societal structures are tainted by the effects of sin. We also recognise that we naturally tend towards sinful actions.

“For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God” (1 Peter 3:18).

Through His death on the cross, Jesus has dealt with the penalty and power of sin, so that God’s people are reconciled with Him as His children. We recognise that we are saved from sin by God’s grace alone. Out of gratitude to and love for the Lord we are motivated to obey and to serve Him. We have God’s Spirit who renews our minds, so that we are able to make godly, wise decisions for good purposes.

“In keeping with His promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness ... since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with Him.” (2 Peter 3:13-14).

The completion of God’s work is yet to occur. In the meantime, since we are still in a broken, sinful world, we strive to live Godly lives in anticipation of the fulfilment of God’s plan and purposes.

“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens, you have just won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them take it to the church, and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan” (Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 18:15-17).

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control.”

We recognise that despite our intentions to live Godly lives, disagreements and conflicts arise between us. We seek to resolve such conflicts by following the Lord’s teaching. If one person has a concern about, or complaint against another person, the first step is to take it to that person directly with the aim of helpfully communicating and resolving the problem. This requires Godly wisdom, Christ-like actions and the fruit of the Spirit. If the matter is not resolved, others become involved in a considered process.

In the light of God’s creative and redemptive work in the world made complete in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are compelled to honour and glorify God in our lives and our relationships. We are also compelled to resolve conflict and grievances according to the teaching in the Bible.

As far as possible, grievances should be resolved by discussion between the parties to achieve mutually acceptable outcomes. In these circumstances no further action would result from the grievance. If resolution of the grievance requires intervention by others, the eventual resolution remains with the parties. In any grievance matters, parties must act respectfully towards each other and maintain confidentiality in all the circumstances of the matter.

Sometimes following this procedure may lead to disciplinary action against one or other party to a grievance. Disciplinary action will be taken in accordance with the Staff Code of Conduct or Performance Management Policy.

The school's provision of remedies will reflect what is fair and reasonable in the circumstances, complies with its legal obligations and is good practice. In the event that the complaint is shown to be justified and involves poor service or a technical failure by the school, the following remedies may be considered appropriate (at the school's absolute discretion):

- correction;
- technical assistance;
- provision of additional information;
- referral;
- assistance;
- apology; or
- compensation.

Principles Involved

The following principles inform the content of this policy:

(a) Commitment

This school will investigate all complaints in accordance with this policy. This will be reflected in the:

- Adoption and distribution of the Complaints Handling Policy and Procedures
- Appropriate training of workers in the implementation of this policy
- Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of effectiveness of the complaints handling policy and procedures.

(b) Responsiveness

Complaints will be dealt with promptly. The process and the time needed to resolve an issue will vary depending on the nature and complexity of the issue.

(c) Visibility

The existence of this complaint handling policy and procedures, its purpose and the method of accessing it will be promoted internally for staff and externally to the community.

(d) Subsidiarity

The process of responding to a formal complaint will reflect the principle of subsidiarity. This means that we expect that complaints may be resolved wherever possible at the lowest level of management necessary for their proper resolution. The Principal, therefore, will not be directly involved in the resolution of those complaints which are more appropriately handled by others in the school community.

(e) Procedural fairness

The principles of procedural fairness will be followed in all aspects of complaint handling. Procedural fairness includes:

- Giving you the opportunity to put your case
- Offering reasonable assistance to you to enable the complaint to be made and to know the complaint handling procedures
- Informing the respondent of the substance of the complaints and providing an opportunity to respond
- Providing the respondent with information about the complaint investigation process including outcomes
- Handling the complaint process confidentially

- Determining complaints as expeditiously as possible and advising you and the respondent of the outcome of the investigation
 - Assessing the facts and circumstances of the situation objectively and determining the complaint fairly and equitably
 - Providing you with details of the determination and reasons for the decision
 - Informing you and the respondent of any avenue for review
- (f) Confidentiality
Confidentiality is an obligation to the provider of information while privacy is an obligation to the subject of the information. In making a complaint you can feel secure that your complaint will remain confidential. Confidentiality will be respected at all times within the constraints of the need to fully investigate the complaint. The obligation to maintain confidentiality extends also to you as the complainant and to the respondent.
- (g) Access and equity
The complaints handling process needs to be accessible and additional assistance may be available to you if you are from a culturally and linguistically diverse background, have a disability or are a young person.
- (h) No victimisation
If you make a complaint in good faith you will be protected from detrimental action including victimisation or unfair treatment.
- (i) Vexatious or malicious complaints
There is an underlying assumption that complaints are made in good faith (and with good will) and with an intention for resolution as opposed to retribution.
- (j) Anonymous complaints
Anonymous complaints do not reflect the principles outlined above. If you make an anonymous verbal complaint to the school you will be encouraged to identify yourself in order for the procedures outlined in this policy to be implemented fully. If you choose to remain anonymous, then in the case of verbal complaints you will be informed that the complaint may not be acted upon.

Sources of Advice

Advice for parties to grievances may be sought from the Principal.

Grievances to the Ombudsman

Grievances about administrative actions and decisions of the school can be made to the New South Wales Ombudsman as the office of last resort, after having followed the steps laid down in the Grievance Resolution Process.

GRIEVANCE RESOLUTION PROCESS

Wellington Christian School takes seriously its responsibilities to handle grievances promptly and impartially. These procedures should be read in conjunction with any other relevant school policies.

The following steps should be followed if, as a student, parent or a member of staff, you wish to express a complaint or raise a concern:

STEP 1

Speak to the person concerned directly

Communication and dispute resolution involving parents:

Parents are often uncertain about whom to contact in the School if they have questions or concerns. Generally speaking, all levels of management of the School and the Board are open to parents, however, we do expect the Biblical principle of first speaking to the person most immediately concerned with the issue. (The same principle applies when one parent has a concern about another parent's children in the School). The following guidelines should be helpful. In each case you can take a matter to someone with wider or higher responsibility if it has not been answered or resolved.

If you have a question, concern, complaint or suggestion in relation to:

- your child or some general classroom practice, speak to the class teacher first;
- policy or practice in a section of the School, or
- the whole Primary School, speak to the Principal.

If you have a question, concern or suggestion in relation to:

- general bus behaviour, speak to the Primary Coordinator or Principal
- student counselling, contact the School Psychologist
- curriculum across the School, contact the Principal
- the Library and its resources, speak to the Principal;
- Fees and other financial matters or maintenance of the buildings and grounds, contact the Administration Manager or Business Manager;
- General administrative matters (eg bus passes, book lists, etc) contact the School Office.

If you have any continuing concern after following the above steps or any question, concern or suggestion in relation to general school policy, practice or resources see the Principal and/or follow steps 2-4 below.

- If your complaint or matter of concern is about a member of staff first speak directly to the member of staff.
- If your complaint or matter of concern is about school policies or decisions made by the school, first speak directly to the member of staff responsible for the implementation of the policy, or the person who made the decision. Seek clarification from the Principal or Primary Coordinator if you are unsure of the person to whom you should address your concern or complaint.
- In certain circumstances it may be considered impossible to approach the relevant staff member directly and individually. Where this is perceived to be the case, the Principal may be approached, but the Principal's initial role will be to assist in facilitating communication between the parties.
- Matters of complaint about a student or students should NOT be addressed directly to a child, but should be directed to a member of staff, such as the appropriate class teacher, Primary Coordinator or Principal for management of the process of investigation, communication and resolution.
- If the matter can be resolved to the satisfaction of all parties, no further steps are required.

STEP 2

Refer the complaint to the relevant senior staff member

- If a satisfactory resolution is not reached using Step 1, either party may refer the matter in writing, or through a formal personal meeting to the Primary Coordinator. If the Primary Coordinator is unable to resolve the matter it should then be referred to the Principal for further attention.
- Formal complaint resolution procedures are used by senior staff to facilitate proper investigation, impartial decision making, and to afford procedural fairness and timeliness to all parties.
- Complaints dealt with at this level and above are documented in a register of complaints, to assist the school in identifying and rectifying problems that are recurring, or to identify systemic issues that require attention.
- If the matter can be resolved to the satisfaction of all parties at this level no further steps are required.

STEP 3

Refer to Principal for final determination

- If a satisfactory resolution is not reached either party may refer the matter to the Principal for determination.
- The Principal will impartially review the information, processes, and decisions up to this point, and will invite or request further information from either or both parties. The Principal will then make a final determination to resolve the matter, observing principles of procedural fairness and timeliness. The final determination, including reasons for the decision will be communicated in writing.
- Complaints dealt with at this level are documented in a register of complaints, to assist the school in identifying and rectifying problems that are recurring, or to identify systemic issues that require attention.
- If the matter can be resolved to the satisfaction of all parties at this level no further steps are required.

STEP 3b

Grievances directly involving the Principal

In the event of a complaint against the Principal, the Board will act in the place of the Principal within the resolution steps. In the event of the need for final review/appeal, an independent adjudicator acceptable to both parties will be engaged.

STEP 4

Review by School Board

- If the determination of the Principal, including any remedies offered by the school is unacceptable to the complainant, the complainant may lodge a written appeal to the school Board, requesting review of the School's determination. Similarly, the Principal may refer a matter to the Board if it is considered that the detail of the complaint requires an independent assessment whether by reason of complexity, matters of principle raised or otherwise.

- The role of the Board review will be to determine whether the principles and requirements of this policy have been complied with, whether school procedures have been followed adequately, and whether the complaint has been dealt with fairly. In the event that this policy has not been complied with, the Principal may be directed to reconsider the complaint in accordance with the principles and procedures outlined in this policy.
- The Board will indicate the outcome of the review to both the school and the complainant in writing.

Related Policies & Procedures	Person Responsible
Child Protection Policy	Principal
Complaints Register	Principal
Privacy Policy	Principal