



Concern and Grievance Policy and Procedure

2016

This Policy is applicable to: Teachers, Parents and Students

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Table of Contents

CONCERN AND GRIEVANCE POLICY	3
CONCERN AND GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE	4
POLICIES AFFECTED	4
AN OPEN ORGANISATION: CLIMATE AND CULTURE	4
RECORD KEEPING	6
CONFIDENTIALITY	6
ANONYMOUS COMPLAINTS	7
RESOLUTION	7
INTRACTABLE COMPLAINTS	8
STUDENTS’ COMPLAINTS	9
TRAINING	9
FLOW CHART	10
REFERENCES	12
Appendix 1 – Concerns Form	13

CONCERN AND GRIEVANCE POLICY

This policy explains what to do if you have a concern or grievance about anything to do with The Silver Tree Steiner School. A “concern” means any type of problem, grievance, worry or complaint about any aspect of the Silver Tree School including discrimination. The procedure may be used by parents, guardians or members of the public and school community. This procedure may be used by a student’s parent or guardian on behalf of a concern or grievance their child has.

For example, you could have a concern about:

- A bullying issue
- How an issue has been handled
- The actions of another member of the school community
- Safety in the school
- A child’s treatment by a member of staff
- Financial issues
- Discrimination

Silver Tree Steiner School welcomes and encourages all feedback. Silver Tree recognises that concerns and grievances are important pieces of information for the school and that good procedures are needed to ensure concerns are heard, recorded, and addressed in a timely manner.

In all instances, confidentiality will be maintained and the matter handled with sensitivity.

CONCERN AND GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

- All concerns, large or small, are important pieces of information for the school and we welcome knowing about them and using them to help in improving the running of the school.
- All members of the school community are obliged to follow these procedures.

POLICIES AFFECTED

The following school policies should be read in conjunction with the Concern and Grievance Policy.

- Records Management
- Privacy Principles Policy

AN OPEN ORGANISATION: CLIMATE AND CULTURE

Problems can arise if parents feel that the school is not open to their concerns. It is better to have a direct complaint to a member of staff than to have parents sharing their dissatisfaction with others. Parents like to feel valued and involved with the school and they should be encouraged to voice their concerns. STSS encourages:

- that the school is open and accessible to all parents
- listens to parents and students
- encourages parents to contact the Administrator, teacher or office staff directly
- and provides support to staff to ensure they are comfortable in dealing with complaints

What constitutes a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem.

A complaint may be made if a parent thinks that the school has, for example:

- done something wrong;
- failed to do something it should have done; or
- acted unfairly or impolitely.

A complaint may be made about the school as a whole, about a specific department in the school or about an individual member of staff.

All complaints will be handled seriously. A gentle expression of concern, or a simple query, may grow into a dispute or confrontational matter if parents feel that they have been brushed aside.

Serious issues may be raised in an informal and friendly way and apparently trivial issues in an adversarial manner. Complaints against members of staff need particularly sensitive handling.

Lines of Approach

It may be appropriate that all members of staff are encouraged to deal with parental concerns that lie within their area of responsibility. Staff shall be trained in dealing with complaints.

If approached about a matter that lies outside their responsibility, staff should refer the person to the policy and advise them of the next step.

Some parents will wish to go straight to the Administrator with their concerns, and this should be respected. However, it should be explained that the Administrator might not be able to respond until he/she has consulted the staff that can help.

Serious complaints should be shared with the Chair of the School Governing Body by the Administrator. There may be certain circumstances, such as complaints about the Administrator, when the parents will need to write directly to the Chair, whose address should be readily available.

Reducing Anxiety

Anxiety can be reduced for all the parties of a complaint by taking the matter seriously and dispelling uncertainty about how the complaint will be handled. This will be achieved by:

- Making sure information about the complaints procedure is clear.
- Acknowledging complaints immediately or at most within five working days. Staff should inform parents what is happening to their concern or complaint and, if a more detailed response is needed, by what date it will be received. The issue should be dealt with as quickly as possible.
- Confirming the nature of the complaint and what is concerning the complainant.
- Assuring parents that their views matter.

RECORD KEEPING

The school will keep an effective log of complaints and other parental concerns as they may become:

- the cause of legal action in the future;
- patterns in the record may indicate a need for action;
- the Administrator should be able to check the log and report on it regularly to the School Governing Body.

The log will contain the following information:

- date when the issue was raised;
- name of parent;
- name of pupil;
- brief statement of issue;
- location of detailed file;
- member of staff handling the issue; and
- brief statement of outcome.

Confidential files on all complaints will be maintained and kept together, cross-referenced with other files as necessary. The files will contain simple but clear notes of all conversations with parents about any source of dissatisfaction. This applies to friendly chats and to telephone conversations, as misunderstandings easily arise. There should be a clear statement of what is concerning the complainants. The notes can be agreed with parents.

Records concerning students need to be kept for 7 years after the student reaches 18 years of age.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality is an important issue for pupils, parents and staff. It is essential that any complaint is treated in a confidential manner and with respect.

Parents often seek an assurance of confidentiality before expressing their concerns. If, for example, they wish to discuss a particular member of staff, they may fear that their child will suffer in some way because they have complained.

It is the school's policy that complaints made by parents should not rebound adversely on their children and similarly that complaints raised by pupils should not rebound on them or on other pupils.

The question of confidentiality should be discussed sensitively and on an individual basis with the parents and the school's policy should be carefully explained.

Members of staff should know about complaints that might be damaging to their reputation. Training will help staff to deal not only with complaints that are made to them, but also to complaints that are made about them. Schools should be aware of the need to provide support for staff against whom a complaint is made. This may involve a colleague who is not involved in the complaint.

If there is a situation involving the Police, the Administrator or next most senior staff member, if the Administrator is unavailable, must take responsibility for actioning the complaint. The Chair of the Governing Body should be informed as soon as possible.

ANONYMOUS COMPLAINTS

Anonymous complaints may be where there is no name or address supplied, or where the complainants say that they do not wish to be identified.

Parents and students should be encouraged to give their names and should be given reassurance on the issue of confidentiality. If they persist in wishing to remain anonymous, it is at the Administrator's discretion as to what action, if any, should be taken, depending on the nature of the complaint.

Anonymous complaints should be recorded in the log.

RESOLUTION

Satisfaction for a complainant may come from any of the following:

- knowing that changes have been made, and that matters will be different in future
- knowing that the school is now alert to a possible problem
- feeling that their concern has been considered seriously
- an outcome which may be different from the one they sought, but which they perceive to be well-considered
- a considered letter
- an apology.

If time has been needed to consider matters, parents will receive a report letter. This will assure the complainant that the issue has been understood and the matter is being dealt with.

Schools need to be aware that they are not obliged to keep complainants informed as to what action has been taken. This is especially important when the matter involves a staff member. The complainant may be assured that action has been taken. This will help prevent misinformation being circulated in the school community.

INTRACTABLE COMPLAINTS

Most complaints can be resolved if approached positively. A complaint may become intractable, due to its nature or to the way in which it was handled, or possibly because the parent perceives the school to have 'closed ranks' against him or her.

Intractable complaints are usually taken to the School Governing Body Chair, the Conciliation Committee or an arbiter.

- **Referral to the Chair of the School Governing Body**

The Administrator will refer any matter to the Chair of the School Governing Body and inform the parents that this stage has been reached. However, a situation may arise where the complainant is unhappy with the Administrator's response. In this case the parent should be able to write directly to the Chair.

The Chair will discuss the matter fully with the Administrator and be provided with relevant documentation. If a briefing is required from a member of staff, this should occur in the presence of the Administrator.

The Chair should respond to the parents, notifying them that he/she is reviewing the matter, asking them if they wish to add anything further and providing a date by which they may expect a response.

The Chair's response should be clear and detailed, and should offer a meeting if the parents remain troubled.

- **Meeting with the Chair of the School Governing Body**

If a meeting is requested, the Chair will offer to meet the parents at a time convenient to them. Those to be involved are:

- the Chair of the School Council
- the Administrator and, at the most, one other member of staff
- the parents

Parents should be permitted to bring with them a supportive friend who is not involved with the complaint. Legal representation would be discouraged at this stage.

The Chair, after questioning and listening to the parents and the Administrator, may be able to find a solution. If this is not possible, and the parents wish to take the matter further, the Chair could consider the Conciliation Committee (if the school has one) or seek the advice of an independent arbitrator.

- **Referral to an Arbiter**

As a final step in the disputes and complaints procedure, **if appropriate**, schools could use an independent arbiter to resolve an issue. The arbiter would have to be:

- Agreed by both parties
- Remunerated by both parties (if appropriate)
- Assured both parties will accept the arbiter's decision.

- **Further Action**

At all stages of a complaints resolution procedure the complainant can seek legal advice if they wish.

STUDENTS' COMPLAINTS

The principles that apply to parental complaints will also be applied to complaints and concerns from students.

Students are be able to raise concerns with any member of staff with whom they feel comfortable, whether it is the class teacher, a member of the support staff the College Counsellor or the Administrator.

TRAINING

In order for all staff, including support staff, know how to carry out their responsibilities appropriate training will be provided.

FLOW CHART

Step 1: Meet With The Relevant Person Concerned

Where possible discuss directly with the person involved, seeking resolution. Often problems can be resolved at this level.



If concern is not resolved or both parties are unable to resolve the issue.



Step 2 (a): Meet With Administrator/principal

Please fill in a Concern Report Form, deliver it to the Administrator by placing in his/her in tray in the office, handing to him/her in person, or by mailing to the school addressed to The Administrator and marking the envelope “Confidential”.

If the matter is urgent phone the office to make an appointment with the Administrator.

The Administrator/Principal will get back to you within three days of receipt of your Concerns Form and will discuss with you the best next step.

The Administrator/Principal may consult widely both inside and outside the school and organise appropriate meetings to help facilitate a resolution of the concern. Then move to Step 3.

OR

If the Grievance is in relation to the Administrator please see Step 2 (b) below.



Step 2 (b): If the grievance is in relation to the Administrator – Meeting with the Board Chairperson.

Please fill in a Concern Report Form, attention to the Chair of the Board by email, handing to him/her in person, or by mailing to the school addressed to The Chairperson and marking the envelope “Confidential”. If the matter is urgent phone the office to make an appointment with the Chairperson.

The Chairperson will get back to you within three days of receipt of your Concerns Form and will discuss with you the best next step.

The Chairperson may consult widely both inside and outside the school and organise appropriate meetings to help facilitate a resolution of the concern. Then move to Step 4.



If concern is not resolved to a favourable outcome for both parties



Step 3: Write to the Chair of the Board of Governors

If the concern is about the Administrator or the concern could not be resolved through the Administrator, contact in writing the Chairperson of the Board of Governors or another Board Member if for some reason the Chairperson is not appropriate. Please keep a written record.

The Board of Governors may confer amongst themselves and/or seek help from relevant advisory or legal bodies. The person with the concern will receive a written reply from the Board.



If the concern is not resolved to a satisfactory outcome.



Step 4. Arbitration

An outside arbitrator may be used to bring the matter to a conclusion. The relevant parties may bring support people to this process.

In all cases, confidentiality is to be rigorously protected.

In all cases, as rapid a resolution as possible is sought, without compromising the integrity of the decision.

KEY PRINCIPALS

Confidential – only the people directly involved in the grievance or sorting it out, can have access to information. See the section headed “Record Keeping” for more information about where and how records will be kept.

Impartial (fair) – all sides get a chance to tell their side of the story. No-one makes any assumptions or takes any action until all relevant information has been collected and considered. All sides have access to support if they want or need it.

Free of unfair repercussions or victimization – the Administrator and Board of Governors takes all necessary steps to make sure people involved in a grievance are not victimised for coming forward with a grievance or helping sort it out.

Sorted out at the immediate level, if possible – we will aim to sort out all grievances at the immediate level, if possible, with the minimum of fuss. In many cases, grievances can be sorted out by agreement between the people involved with no need for further action to be taken.

Sensitivity – The Administrator and Board of Governors will treat all concerns seriously and sensitively.

Timely – we aim to deal with all concerns as quickly as possible. The Administrator will keep you informed with the progress of the issue.

Record Keeping

The Administrator and Staff will keep written notes of:

- their interviews with all parties to a grievance; and
- what action they took to resolve the grievance.

These notes will be kept within the Administrator’s office while the issue is being resolved. Once the matter has been finalised, the Administrator will keep all records of concerns in a secure location. Records will be reviewed at least annually so that systemic problems can be identified and trends reported upon.

Support

When a meeting occurs between a member of staff and a parent, both parties are able to have a support person present.

The support person does not say anything in grievance meetings. They are simply there to provide moral / emotional support for the person/s involved. The support person is also bound by confidentiality.

REFERENCES

AISWA Disputes and Complaints Policy and Procedure Guidelines

Available: <https://www.ais.wa.edu.au>

Department of Education - Complaints Management

Available: <http://det.wa.edu.au/standardsandintegrity>

School Education Act (WA) 1999 and Regulations 2000 (WA) – Independent Schools

Available: <http://www.slp.wa.gov.au/legislation/statutes.nsf>



Appendix 1 – Concerns Form

Concern Report Form

This form is to be used for all Concerns, Grievances and Complaints within the school.

Once completed place in Administrator's in tray kept in the office. You can also return form by mail; mark envelope as CONFIDENTIAL and it will be opened only by Administrator. DO NOT EMAIL THIS FORM. Concerns will be processed in accordance with Concerns and Grievance Policy.

INDICATE LEVEL OF CONCERN TO YOU (circle): MINOR MIDDLE MAJOR

- Date: _____
- Name of person filling in this form:

- Contact phone number:

- Person filling in this form is a (please circle):

Teacher

Parent/ Guardian

Teaching Assistant

Other (specify)

Brief description of concern:

What you would like to see happening:

Thank you for filling out this form. You will be contacted by the Administrator who will let you know how your concern is being addressed.