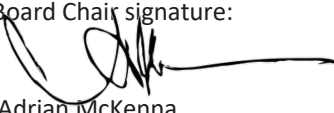




# Complaints Policy

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<b>Approved by Southern Christian College Board:</b>	Board Chair signature:  Adrian McKenna	Date of Authorisation:  November 2022
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<b>Owner:</b>	Southern Christian College	

## Introduction

Southern Christian College is committed to providing a safe and supportive working and learning environment for all members of the school community. To achieve this the school fosters trusting and cooperative relationships where regular, open and constructive communication between all stakeholders is encouraged. The school acknowledges that misunderstandings and differences of opinion may occur from time to time and that these need to be resolved in a satisfactory manner for all parties. Southern Christian College has developed a framework for resolving parent, guardian (parent) or student complaints and in a dignified and respectful manner.

Southern Christian College's approach to handling complaints is based on the school's intention:

- To provide a safe and supportive learning environment.
- To build positive and genuine relationships between students, parents and staff.
- To provide a safe working environment for all staff.
- To identify and correct any misconceptions.
- To resolve complaints fairly, efficiently, promptly and in accordance with Government guidelines.
- For the restoration of a normal relationship between the relevant parties.
- For the healing of any damage to a party's relationship with our God.

Southern Christian College is committed to resolving all complaints promptly at a school level, in a non-judgemental manner where parents, students and staff are treated fairly and given ample opportunity to present their views. Student grievances will use Restorative Justice principles, as per the *Student Restorative Justice and Practices Policy*. Time frames for dealing with complaints are outlined in the flow chart.

## Purpose

The purpose of the school's Complaints Policy is to establish clear guidelines for responding to and resolving concerns raised by parents, caregivers or students. The policy ensures that:

- The school meets its obligation to respond to parent, caregiver or students' complaints in a fair, effective and efficient manner.
- Parents, caregivers and students are informed of how they may raise their concerns or complaint with the school.
- A formal and transparent process for resolving complaints is maintained and communicated to all members of the school community.

## Scope

The policy applies to any member of the school community who has concerns or feels dissatisfied with the treatment of their child, educational outcomes or pastoral care provided by Southern Christian College at any time.

**Key Definitions:**

Complaint: An expression of dissatisfaction with action taken, decisions made, services provided, or failure to provide a service, take action or make a decision.

Complainant: Parent or caregiver who formally expresses dissatisfaction with the school over action taken, decisions made or services provided, or failure to provide a service, take action or make a decision.

Grievance: A real or believed complaint over something believed to be wrong or unfair.

Parent: A 'parent' includes:

- Any person who has parental responsibility for 'major long term issues' as defined in the *Family Law Act 1975 (Commonwealth)*.
- Any person appointed as 'guardian'.
- An informal carer with whom the child normally or regularly resides, and who has day-to-day care and control of the child.

Resolved: A complaint is considered to be 'resolved' when the complaint and the school agree on an appropriate response or course of action.

Unresolved: A complaint is considered 'unresolved' when an agreement cannot be reached on an appropriate response or course of action to be taken.

**Guiding Principles:**

The School's Complaints Policy reflects the following guiding principles in accordance with *AS/NZ 10002:2014 Guidelines for Complaint Management in Organisations*.

Visibility / Accessibility:

Information about how and where to make a complaint, as well as how they will be handled, will be regularly communicated to the school community. This policy will be made publicly available via the school website. The complaint-handling process is flexible and includes the ability to make a complaint in person, via email, by phone or in writing. Support will also be provided to parents with special needs, including translations, interpreters and enabling a parent to seek the services of an advocate.

Responsiveness:

Receipt of a written complaint or email will be promptly acknowledged by a member of the school. Dependant on the grievance or complaint this may be by a member of staff the executive Team or the Principal. Complaints will be addressed promptly with parents kept informed on the progress of their complaint.

Objectivity:

Each complaint will be treated in an equitable, objective and unbiased manner.

Cost:

There will be no cost to the parent for access to the complaint-handling process at the school.

**Protection of Privacy:**

Personally identifiable information concerning the parent will be actively protected from disclosure except where needed in relation to the complaint. This means that the complaint will only be discussed with those directly involved in the complaint-handling process.

**Student Focused:**

The school will remain open to feedback, including complaints, and will demonstrate a commitment to resolving complaints with the educational wellbeing of students as the first priority.

**Accountability:**

The school is accountable, both internally and externally, for its decision making and complaint management performance. The school will provide explanations and reasons for decisions made and provide these to relevant stakeholders as required.

**Implementation:**

**Making a Complaint:**

Our school operates in a culture of collaboration, consultation and open communication. While we accept our responsibility to consult, and to communicate both clearly and effectively with the community, community members also have the obligation to read notices and newsletters, to attend briefings, and to seek clarification when required.

There may, however, still be times when members of the community disagree or are confused about the things that we are doing. A complaint can be made to the school in person, via the phone or in writing or email.

Prior to making a formal complaint the school encourages the complainant to raise their concern or issue with the relevant staff member in an attempt to resolve the issue.

The complaint should be made to the following stakeholders dependant on circumstance:

- The Student's Teacher where it relates to teaching and learning issues or incidents that occur in their class or group.
- The Pastoral Carer if students from several classes are involved.
- The Principal or a member of the Executive Team where an issue or concern relates to a staff member or complex student issues.
- The Principal about issues relating to school policy or school management.
- The Principal about issues relating to students or other families.

Clarification regarding the appropriate point of contact for a complaint can be made by contacting the office on 6229 5744.

Complainants can seek the services of an advocate when they feel they are unable to express their concern clearly. An advocate can be a friend or someone who is available through an appropriate support organisation who does not receive a fee for service.

- All parties involved in addressing a complaint may agree to seek the services of a mutually agreed mediator when there is difficulty coming to an agreement.
- No parties will be victimised during the process of the investigation.
- Southern Christian College may choose to put additional measures in place to ensure the safety of involved parties.
- Southern Christian College will ensure that the complainant is aware of these supports. A complainant who wishes to use these support services should ensure the person addressing the concern or complaint is aware of their intention and is in agreement.

**Parent Expectation:**

Southern Christian College expects parents raising concerns or complaints to:

- Do so promptly, as soon as possible after the issue occurs or the concern has been realised;
- Provide complete and factual information about the concern or complaint, preferably in writing or via email;
- Maintain and respect the privacy and confidentiality of all parties;
- Acknowledge that a common goal is to achieve an outcome acceptable to all parties;
- Act in good faith, and in a calm and courteous manner;
- Show respect and understanding of differing points of view and value difference, rather than judging and blaming;
- Recognise that all parties have rights and responsibilities which must be balanced.

Complaints can be made via the School's Formal Complaints Form located on the school's website.

Southern Christian College will not tolerate parents who approach children from other families with a school related complaint. In the interests of safety and respect for all within the school community, parents must bring their concerns or complaints to the relevant Staff Member, or the Principal to ensure that an appropriate resolution can be achieved.

**Initial Response to Complaints:**

Southern Christian College will make all reasonable efforts to promptly respond and resolve complaints made by any member of the school community.

Upon receipt of a complaint of a serious nature (those that require intervention or investigation), the school will document:

- Name and contact details of the person with a concern or complaint;
- The date the concern was expressed or complaint made;
- The form in which the concern or complaint was received (such as face-to-face, by telephone, in writing, by email);
- A brief description of the concern or complaint;
- Any recommendations for future improvement in the school's policy or procedures.

The School will then:

- Promptly acknowledge receipt of the concern or complaint either in writing or via email.
- Establish a clear timeline for investigating and responding to the complaint and commit to adhering to this timeline.
- Provide the complainant with a copy of the school's *Complaints Policy* in order to establish clear expectations. This may also be accessed via the school's website.

Upon receipt of a concern or complaint of a less serious nature (those anticipated not to require intervention or investigation) the school will:

- Acknowledge receipt of the concern or complaint verbally and commit to providing a prompt response to the complainant with possible resolutions.

### **Addressing Complaints:**

Southern Christian College may choose to consider either an informal or more formal approach to addressing complaints. The school will generally, in the first instance, choose an informal approach as it may prevent the escalation of a minor dispute to a more serious complaint.

### **Informal Options:**

The following informal options could be considered:

- Self-resolution – The parties themselves may resolve concerns in open discussion with the provision of relevant information or the clarification of issues. This option involves reflection and conversations respectful of each person's needs in the school.
- Supported self-resolution – The parties may be assisted to resolve a possible misunderstanding, miscommunication or lack of clarity about the issue in question by a support person such as the Principal, a member of the Executive Team, a colleague, or counsellor providing professional advice or support.

### **Formal Options:**

In circumstances where no mutually acceptable resolution to the matter is reached through informal resolution, or in cases where the matter is considered to be serious, formal procedures can include:

- Intervention – The Principal may meet with the party, or parties separately or jointly. If this does not resolve the issue then the Principal makes a decision and notifies the parties of that decision.
- Facilitated mediation – The parties may be assisted by a facilitator who is trained in mediation to identify issues, explore options and consider alternatives to find a resolution. The facilitator may be an external mediator, the Principal, a member of the Executive Team or a counsellor.
- Investigation – A complaint about a person concerning an alleged serious breach of legislation, school policy or procedure (e.g. student bullying, student drug and alcohol issues) may require an investigation. This may also involve relevant members of the College Board, the Teachers Registration Board (TRB) or the Office of the Education Registrar (OER).

**Complaint Escalation:**

If a matter cannot be resolved at the school level through formal or informal options, or if the complaint is about the Principal of the school, the complainant may be referred to the College Board, through the Chairman.

**Complaint Resolution:**

Where a concern or complaint is substantiated in whole or part and a resolution has been agreed upon, the school will offer an appropriate response. This may include, but not be limited to the following:

- An explanation or further information about the issue;
- Mediation, counselling or other support;
- An apology, expression of regret or admission of fault;
- To change its decision;
- To change its policies, procedures or practices;
- To cancel a debt (such as for school payments);
- A fee refund.

**Complaints Against Teachers & Staff Members:**

The nature of the complaint will determine who is the most appropriate person or body to manage a complainant's concerns.

**Misconduct:**

All complaints of alleged misconduct or serious misconduct by a teacher or staff member should be reported to the Principal of the school. Complaints about teachers can also be reported to the Teachers Registration Board (TRB) which is the regulator in relation to the registration and investigation of serious misconduct (including conduct which is of a physical or emotional nature) of all teachers in the state of Tasmania.

In some cases, certain actions which involve physical or emotional misconduct, such as unlawful assault or threats to the person, may constitute a criminal offence. These types of offences should be reported to and investigated by the police. Initial consultation with the Principal of the school may help to determine the appropriate course of action in these circumstances.

**Complaints Against the School Principal**

In the case of complaints involving the Principal, the College Board, through the Chairman, should be informed immediately.

**Addressing Complaints Against the School Principal:**

The College Board may choose to consider either an informal or more formal approach to addressing complaints. The College Board will generally, in the first instance, choose an informal approach as it may prevent the escalation of a minor dispute to a more serious complaint.

**Informal Options:**

The following informal options could be considered:

- Self-resolution – The parties themselves may resolve concerns in open discussion with the provision of relevant information or the clarification of issues. This option involves reflection and conversations respectful of each person’s needs in the school.
- Supported self-resolution – The parties may be assisted to resolve a possible misunderstanding, miscommunication or lack of clarity about the issue in question by a support person such as the Chairman, a member of the College Board, or counsellor providing professional advice or support.

**Formal Options:**

In circumstances where no mutually acceptable resolution to the matter is reached through informal resolution, or in cases where the matter is considered to be serious, formal procedures can include:

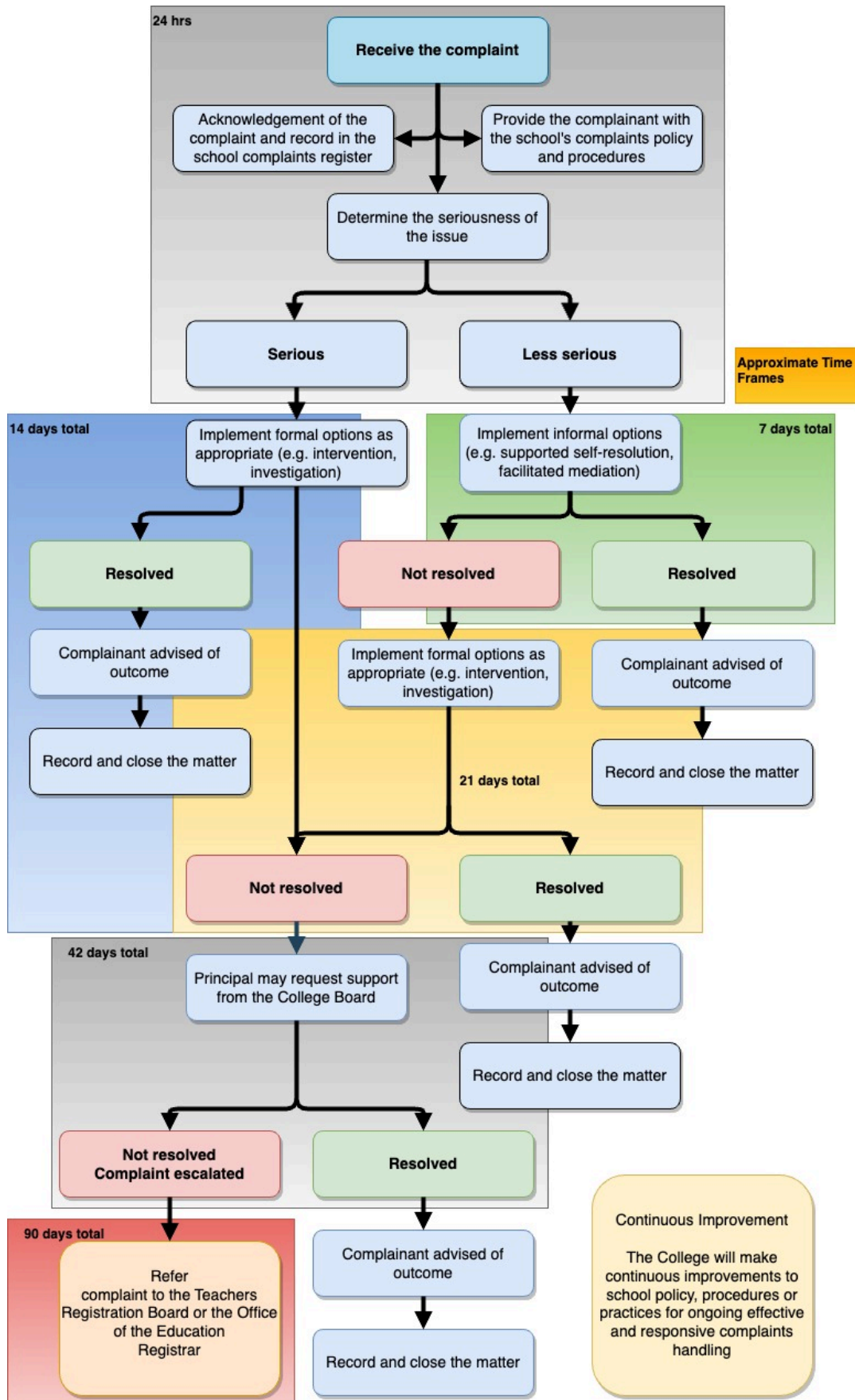
- Intervention – The Chairman or delegated Board member may meet with the party, or parties separately or jointly. If this does not resolve the issue then the Chairman or delegated Board member makes a decision and notifies the parties of that decision.
- Facilitated mediation – The parties may be assisted by a facilitator who is trained in mediation to identify issues, explore options and consider alternatives to find a resolution. The facilitator may be an external mediator, the Chairman or delegated Board member, or a counsellor.
- Investigation – A complaint about the Principal concerning an alleged serious breach of legislation, school policy or procedure (e.g. student bullying, student drug and alcohol issues) may require an investigation. This may involve relevant members of the College Board, the Teachers Registration Board (TRB) or the Office of the Education Registrar (OER).

**Complaint Escalation:**

If a matter regarding the Principal cannot be resolved at the school level through formal or informal options, the complainant may be referred to the Office of the Education Registrar (OER).



**Complaint Flowchart**



**Related policies, procedures and other documents**

- ◆ SCC Complaints and Grievances Procedure
- ◆ SCC Fair Process Policy
- ◆ SCC Data Breach Policy
- ◆ SCC Student Code of Conduct Policy
- ◆ SCC Staff Professional Code of Conduct Policy
- ◆ SCC Anti-Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination policy
- ◆ SCC Student enrolment policy
- ◆ SCC Staff Recruitment and Screening Policy
- ◆ SCC Student Behaviour Management Policy
- ◆ SCC Student Restorative Justice and Practices Policy
- ◆ SCC Website <https://www.scc.tas.edu.au/>
- ◆ SCC Student Guide: Compliments, Complaints, and Suggestions
- ◆ SCC Information for Parents and Carers – Making a Complaint
- ◆ SCC Tips and Advice for effective Complaining
- ◆ The Southern Christian College constitution