

Berengarra School

Berengarra takes a zero-tolerance approach to child abuse and is fully committed to ensuring that its strategies, policies, procedures and practices meet all Child Safety Standards as specified in Ministerial Order No. 1359 (2022)

Complaints and Grievances Policy

1. Context and Purpose

Berengarra School is open to the concerns of parents/guardians, students, staff, visitors and the wider school community and any complaint or grievance will be received in a positive manner and taken seriously.

The purpose of this policy is to provide clear and transparent information about how a parent/guardian, student, staff member, or other member of the school community can raise a complaint or grievance, as well as how the complaint or grievance will be managed and resolved.

The aim of this policy is to ensure that all complaints are managed and resolved fairly, efficiently and promptly.

All decisions related to a complaint or grievance will be made with consideration for the wellbeing of the individual as well as for the School. The School has processes and procedures for annual review and to inform key stakeholders of changes.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all members of the school community including parents/guardians, students, staff, visitors and the wider school community.

This policy does not apply to:

- concerns about child abuse, reportable conduct and student safety .- reference should be made to the school's child safe policies
- protected disclosures under the school's whistleblower policy
- matters relating to bullying, harassment or discrimination – these matters will be managed in accordance with the schools bullying resolution procedures.

With regard to student issues, the School has appropriate internal, student friendly processes for students to use when something goes wrong or is difficult for them.

3. Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, the following definitions apply:

Complaint

A statement that something is unsatisfactory or unacceptable

Grievance

A real or perceived wrong or other cause for complaint or protest especially unfair treatment

Complainant

Refers to the individual making the complaint or grievance

Respondent

Refers to the individual against whom a complaint or allegation is made

4. Expectations

When raising a grievance or complaint, a member of the school community can expect to:

- be treated with courtesy and respect
- have their grievance or complaint taken seriously, considered impartially and dealt with on their merits
- have their grievance or complaint dealt with in a confidential and timely manner
- have access to appropriate and easily understood information regarding the complaint resolution process
- be kept informed of the process and outcome of their grievance or complaint

The School expects that a member of the school community who raises a grievance or complaint will:

- raise concerns as soon as possible after the issue occurs
- provide complete and factual information about the grievance or complaint
- maintain and respect the privacy and confidentiality of all parties
- treat others (including staff, students and parents) with respect and courtesy
- act in good faith to achieve a reasonable outcome
- be mindful that the School must sometimes make decisions that take into account 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 making the complaint.

5. Complaint Resolution

5.1 Informal Complaint

The School's aim is for the prompt resolution of grievances or complaints, ideally without there being the need for a formal complaint to be made.

Complaints or grievances may be made informally by contacting the relevant staff member and making an appointment to discuss the matter.

The following considerations are relevant, prior to, and when raising a complaint or grievance:

- clearly identify the issue prior to contacting the school
- identify the parties involved
- consider the outcome you are trying to achieve (be realistic and open to other outcomes and solutions)
- decide whether the issue or problem is in the nature of a concern, and enquiry or a complaint or grievance
- consider if there are any interim measures you would like the school to consider whilst the School make enquires about the issues raised.

When an issue relates to a student, concerns should first be raised with the relevant teacher. Depending on the nature or severity of an issue and whether there may be a conflict of interest, concerns may be raised with the Head of Campus or with the Principal.

All complaints and grievances whether verbal or in writing will be recorded either by way of electronic file notes or written correspondence and acted upon promptly by the staff member who receives the complaint or grievance.

In situations where attempts to resolve the issue informally are unsuccessful you may choose to make a formal complaint.

An informal approach may not be appropriate for some complaints or grievances because of the seriousness of their nature. In those circumstances a formal complaint should be considered.

5.2 Formal Complaint

If you are not satisfied with the way your concern has been handled or due to the seriousness of the issue, you may choose to make a formal written complaint. Complaints should ordinarily be made within one calendar month of the initial concern first being raised with the School.

A formal complaint should at first instance be addressed to the Principal. If the complaint concerns the Principal, the complaint should be made to the Board Chair, in which case the Chair will manage the process outlined below.

You may write to the Principal, who will then acknowledge receipt of the complaint as soon as practical being usually within three (3) business days, or telephone the School to arrange a meeting. Please note that if phoning to arrange a meeting, Reception staff will take your details and endeavour to confirm a meeting time as soon as it is practicable to do so. You will be asked to detail the nature of your complaint or grievance.

When the Principal is dealing with a complaint, the School's objective is to achieve a resolution by:

- clarifying the substance of the complaint or grievance, and if relevant, any steps taken by the school to address the issue.
- identifying whether the complaint raises an issue regarding non-compliance with the School's procedures or policies
- communicating with you and relevant parent(s), student(s) and staff, in an attempt to resolve the issue by agreement (where practicable).

- failing agreement, investigating the complaint and deciding appropriate outcomes in accordance with procedural fairness and natural justice principles. Any investigation report is confidential to the School.

The Principal may delegate parts of the complaint-management process, and seek the assistance of third parties, however the Principal will make the final decision as to how the complaint or grievance will be resolved.

The Principal will aim to communicate the outcome of a complaint in writing within fifteen (15) business days where practicable.

If the Principal or delegate arranges to meet with you, you may request to have someone else present as a support person. The support person can be a relative or a friend, but it is not appropriate for that person to be a legal representative. Please note that the role of a support person is to provide you with support and not to act as an advocate.

6. Requesting a Review

If you are not satisfied that your complaint has been adequately resolved by the Principal you may request a review by writing to the Board Chair.

Requests for review must be made in writing within ten (10) business days of the date the Principal communicated the outcome of your complaint in writing. The grounds for the review, and in particular any concerns you have with the way the relevant complaint was dealt with, must be clearly identified in the request for a review. The Request for a Review will be acknowledged within five (5) business days where practicable.

In accordance with good governance, the School Board entrusts the Principal with the day-to-day management of the School, and in particular its staff and students. The Principal is accorded significant discretion regarding such matters.

Accordingly, any review of the Principal's decision under this policy will be confined to the Board Chair deciding whether there is evidence that the School's procedures have not been followed, in a way likely to have meaningfully influenced the Principal's decision, or that the Principal unreasonably exercised his discretion.

The outcome of a Review will be communicated to you in writing within fifteen (15) business days where practicable.

7. External Referral of Complaints

In some situations, it may not be possible to resolve the complaint or grievance to the satisfaction of the complainant using these procedures.

If the matter still remains unresolved, the complainant or the School may refer the matter to a relevant body such as The Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT), the Victorian Registration & Qualifications Authority or the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA)

8. Vexatious Complaints

There may be some instances where complaints are determined to be vexatious. In that case the complainant will be advised that the School intends to dismiss their complaint. Making a vexatious complaint may be considered a breach of the School's Codes of Conduct and the School's Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination Policy.

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