Policy title:
Communications, Concerns and Complaints Policy

Purpose:
The purpose of this policy is to provide details about the school’s approach to communication and managing concerns and complaints. We aim to ensure that parents, students and staff are heard and have their concerns managed efficiently and consistently. These guidelines also aim to facilitate the smooth functioning of the school and to assist students, parents and staff to successfully work together. We seek a culture in which stakeholders clearly understand that their concerns will be taken seriously. We see this as one of the means of receiving information for improvement. We believe that complaints are more likely to be resolved smoothly if they are approached with an attitude of respectful communication, responsiveness, fairness and objectivity.

Related documents (eg, procedure):
- Addendum A - Information for Students about Handling Complaints and Grievances
- Addendum B - Academic Grievance Procedure for Year 11 & 12 Students
- Staff Grievance Procedure

Summary overview:
We have expectations that communication between staff and students will be clear and caring, with well-understood boundaries. Students are expected to communicate clearly and politely to adults and peers. Communication between teachers and parents includes a termly class meeting; regular class news via newsletters and direct updates plus parent-teacher interviews at least once per year. The school communicates to parents in a number of ways, including a weekly newsletter, individual letters, regular festivals and events and parent education sessions. Specific information about school management, finances, the board and policies are available to parents by contacting the front office.

Our key principles for the handling of concerns and complaints are that:
- they are received in a positive manner, handled transparently and with sensitivity
- parents and students can expect to be taken seriously and can approach any member of staff about their concerns
- information about how to make a complaint is clear and readily available
- concerns are dealt with in a timely manner and those who have raised them are kept informed about progress
- students will not receive adverse treatment because they or their parents have raised a complaint
- appropriate confidential files and a log are kept, and confidentiality is maintained by all parties
- resolution of the matter is sought within a specified period and discussed with the person making the complaint.
Scope:

This policy applies to parents, teachers and students who have a concern or a complaint. Parents may wish to raise issues themselves or on behalf of their children; students may also choose to raise issues on their own behalf. This policy also applies to teachers who have a complaint against a parent or student.

Policy details

Steps to making a complaint
1) Parents or students should approach the person directly concerned and sensitively attempt to resolve the matter. Methods of communication may include a face-to-face meeting, a telephone call or a letter, but should match the staff member’s preferred mode of communication. An impartial third person may be present at the meeting.
2) If the issue cannot be resolved at this level, the Principal should be approached, either directly or by telephone or letter.
3) If the issue can’t be effectively resolved by the Principal over time, the person making the complaint may write to the Board Chair.

For a concern or complaint about educational issues
Where a parent or student has a concern relevant to the Kindergarten, Primary School or High School or wishes to raise a sensitive or confidential issue, contact the Principal. All other matters should be directed to the class teacher or guardian.

Where appropriate, staff will be informed about complaints made about them. The school will provide support to affected staff members and involve them in reaching a resolution.

General communication at the school
- **Class meetings** - will generally be held once per term and will have a clear agenda, with the opportunity for parents to hear about the curriculum, class matters, and the developmental stages of children, with the opportunity for parents to share experiences and support for their children through the class life together.
- **Class teachers** - will provide regular bulletins and updates throughout the year and will be available for at least one parent-teacher interview during the year.
- **Front office staff** - are available to provide information to parents, keeping in mind their busy roles supporting students, teachers and management. Parents have a responsibility to read school communications so that office staff are not constantly repeating information available through other channels.
- **The Board** - parents may write to the Chair of the Board via the front office of the school and a written response will be received after the matter has been considered.
- **Finances and administration** - parents may address concerns or issues about administration and finances to the Business Manager or another member of the Executive either in writing or by making an appointment to discuss the matter. All members of the Executive require a meeting to be made in advance in order to discuss a non-urgent matter with a parent or other member of the school community.

Legislative context:
The school operates within a state and federal government duty of care and compliance context.
Roles and responsibilities:

Note: **Confidentiality** - It is important that the need for confidentiality is respected by all parties. The number of people who need to know the information may need to be negotiated with the person making a complaint, but it is important that privacy is maintained where possible and that legal responsibilities are fulfilled.

**Parents and students** - Parents have a responsibility to be familiar with and act in accordance with this policy, and to advocate for their child and inform their child of their rights under this policy. Parents also have a responsibility to read communications from the school. Parents should make any complaints or voice concerns directly with the staff member involved, or with the Principal (see above.)

**Staff** - Staff have a responsibility to comply with this policy. The complaints process should be explained to students. Class teacher/guardian lessons can be useful in teaching students how they can support others and in reinforcing that student views are important to the school.

If staff members are approached about a matter that lies outside their area of responsibility, the parent or student will be referred to the staff member concerned or to the Principal.

If a staff member has a complaint about a parent, student or colleague they are to approach the Principal.

Written responses to complaints from parents or students are to be discussed with the Principal

**The school** - will respond sensitively and in a timely manner to all complaints raised by parents and students. The Principal will define an appropriate period to resolve the complaint, and explain the steps that will be taken to both the person making the complaint and the person affected by the complaint. The school will also provide training to staff about managing complaints and grievances.

**Student concerns or complaints**

The principles that apply to parental complaints also apply to complaints and concerns from students. A student may raise their complaint with any staff member of their choice, and it is the responsibility of the staff member to follow the resolution process outlined in this document. Once the matter is resolved, a written record may be generated, on advice from the Principal.

Complaints that appear trivial still need to be handled seriously. Young people may test the complaints procedures on relatively minor issues before finding the confidence to raise something painful, such as bullying. A student may need support from a peer or an adult.

**Complaint resolution process:**

**Recording:**

The school will maintain a log of complaints and concerns that will contain the following information:

- Date when the issue was raised and dates relevant to the process
- Name of person raising the concern
- Name of student concerned
- Name of staff member concerned
- Brief statement of issue
- Staff member handling the issue
- Name of other person/s (if involved)
- Brief statement of outcome.

These files will be accessible to and open to correction by all parties involved in the issue.

This log may be required because:

- it may become the cause of future legal action
patterns in the record may indicate a need for action
the Principal should be able to check the log regularly.

Resolution:
Sometimes the very acknowledgment of an issue by the school brings relief to parents or students.
Satisfaction for a complaint may come from any of the following:
- Knowing that changes have been made to school or teacher process
- 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, thoughtful letter
- An apology.

If time has been needed to consider matters, parents should receive a report letter.

If the complaint is still at an impasse after discussion with the Principal or representative may declare
that there is to be no further debate. That is, the school and the person making the complaint will have
to agree to disagree. Some parents may still wish to follow through by writing to the Board outlined on
page 2.

Anonymous complaints:
Anonymous complaints may be where there is no indication of either name or address, or where the
complainants say that they do not wish to be identified. They may come from members of the public,
parents or from students.

Anonymous complaints do not promote the open ethos that the school fosters. In some instances it
may not be necessary to identify the person raising the concern, such as when parents or the public
bring issues about the behaviour of a group of students.

If a parent wishes to remain anonymous in making a specific complaint, or not be identified to the
person they are complaining about, it will be at the discretion of the Principal, along with any
appropriate action to be taken.

Anonymous complaints are still to be recorded in the log.

Anonymous allegations about child abuse should be monitored closely but no action taken until there
is more certainty about the veracity of the allegation. Refer to the Student Protection Policy.

Definitions:
A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem. A complaint may be
made against the school, a teacher, a student/s, a process or other aspect of the school’s management.

A complaint may be made by a parent or student if they think that the school has, for example:
- done something wrong
- failed to do something it should have done
- acted unfairly or impolitely.

Other:
The Constitution of the Mount Barker Waldorf School confers on the Board the power to make sub-
rules. This policy is a sub-rule of the Constitution and operates as if it were a term of the Constitution.
Addendum A - Information for Students about Handling Concerns and Complaints

We aim to deal with concerns and complaints fairly and consistently. It doesn’t matter if the issue is big or small, by discussing it, a solution may be found. You can make a complaint by yourself, as part of a group, or through your parents. Please note that there is also an Academic Grievance Procedure.

What is a complaint?
Making a complaint means that you are not satisfied with an aspect of the school, a teacher, a student or group of students, or a process. A complaint may be made if you think that the school has done something wrong, failed to do something it should have done, or acted unfairly or impolitely.

Do you have a complaint or a suggestion to make?
Follow this process:
1) Talk to a trusted teacher or, if it’s easier, write it down and give it to the office staff.
2) If you feel the issue is very important, or if you are not able to resolve it at the first step, make a time to discuss it with the Principal.

What will happen next?
If possible, the teacher will deal with it personally. If not, they may go on your behalf to the Principal. They will let you know what is happening.

Do others have to know?
If you are worried about confidentiality, tell the staff - they will understand your concerns. Even if you find the issue hurtful or embarrassing, don’t worry - it will only be discussed with people who need to know and can make decisions about how to resolve the problem.

Our key principles
• Complaints are received in a positive manner, handled transparently and with sensitivity.
• Parents and students can expect to be taken seriously and can approach any member of staff about their concerns.
• Information about how to make a complaint is clear and readily available.
• Concerns are dealt with in a timely manner and those who have raised them are kept informed about progress.
• Students will not receive adverse treatment because they or their parents have raised a complaint.
• Appropriate confidential files and a log are kept, and confidentiality is maintained by all parties.
• Resolution of the matter is sought within a specified period and discussed with the person making the complaint.
Addendum B - Academic Grievance Procedure for Year 11 & 12 Students

We are committed to resolving any student complaint or grievance promptly, equitably and in a professional manner that respects the privacy of all parties involved.

An academic grievance is defined as a complaint or concern about teacher performance, grading/assessment, late submission, or more broadly about the curriculum or an academic process.

This grievance procedure is for academic complaints from:

- current Mt Barker Waldorf School Year 11 & 12 students
- parents or legal guardians of our students under 18 years old.

The key principles for the handling of complaints and grievances are that:

- complaints are received in a positive manner, handled transparently and with sensitivity
- parents and students can expect to be taken seriously and can approach any member of staff about their concerns
- information about how to make a complaint is clear and readily available
- concerns are dealt with in a timely manner and those who have raised them are kept informed about progress
- students will not receive adverse treatment because they or their parents have raised a complaint
- appropriate confidential files and a log are kept, and confidentiality is maintained by all parties
- resolution of the matter is sought within a specified period and discussed with the person making the complaint.

Both the person making the complaint and the person about whom the complaint is directed may bring a support person (such as a friend or family member) to any meetings. All parties may have recourse to a third party mediator at the informal or formal appeals stage.

Students are encouraged to continue to attend their classes as usual while the grievance is being investigated. The only circumstances in which a student would not continue attending classes is if their health or safety is potentially at risk or if they pose a health or safety risk to other students or staff members.

Informal resolution

In the first instance, students or parents are encouraged to reach an informal resolution by approaching the staff member concerned to discuss the issue.

In some circumstances students may feel uncomfortable speaking with the teacher concerned, for example, if it is a complaint about their style of teaching. In this case it is appropriate that the student contact their Class Guardian and discuss the issue informally with them. If still unsatisfied, the student may approach the Assistant Principal with their concern.

Formal complaint

If the issue cannot be resolved informally, a student or their parent may lodge a formal complaint in writing to the Assistant Principal, detailing the issue and the steps taken so far.
If the student is under 18 years old, a parent or guardian can lodge a complaint, with the student’s consent.

Both students and teachers should:

- understand that it is a serious procedure and it will be investigated
- understand that it is a formal complaint as opposed to comments, feedback or suggestion
- be aware that the staff member/s concerned will be informed that a complaint has been made against them or in relation to a decision they have made.

**Investigation**

The Class Guardian or the Assistant Principal will request a formal meeting with the student or parent.

The Assistant Principal will handle grievances by:

- contacting the person about whom the complaint is directed to inform them that a complaint has been made against them or in relation to work assessed by them. The staff member will be given details of the complaint and an opportunity to respond
- hearing the student or parent’s complaint without prejudice, giving the student ample opportunity to air their grievance
- listening without prejudice to the response from the person about whom the complaint is directed
- notifying both parties in writing within a reasonable timeframe of the result of the investigation. The written notification will outline the reasons for the decision being made and any action(s) taken
- advising the person making the complaint, in writing, that the decision may be appealed if they are not satisfied with the investigation process or outcome.

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**DOCUMENT STATUS**

Approved date:  
Review date:  
Mt Barker Waldorf School