



## **COMPLAINTS MANAGEMENT POLICY**

### **Background**

Penrhos College strives to build and maintain positive and cooperative relations with all members of the school community. However, complaints can occur in response to a range of circumstances and practices. This policy provides a commitment to the College's response to complaints management.

### **Objectives**

The objectives of the complaint management policy are to:

- improve the capacity of teaching and operational services staff to manage and resolve complaints in a fair, efficient and consistent manner
- promote community confidence in the College's commitment to service delivery and effective complaint handling
- identify opportunities to improve performance through the collection and analysis of complaint information, and
- provide a single framework for a complaints management system across the College.

### **Policy Statement**

Trust in the school community is enhanced and maintained when complaints are managed well and proactively. A proactive approach to complaints management includes putting sound processes in place and informing people about them, but goes beyond this to include positive two-way communication, relationship management and involving people in decisions.

The principles contained in this policy are relevant to any complaint that may arise, except for staff complaints relating to equity discrimination, equity harassment or bullying or complaints made about which are to be handled through separate policies and procedures. The Penrhos College Complaints Management Procedure should be referred to for the process by which a general complaint is handled.

There are different types of complaints, from a number different sources ranging from simple matters of concern to formal complaints. Matters of concern and complaint may arise in a variety of contexts and will generally be resolved through simple procedures.

A complaint may be made about the College as a whole, about a specific department in the College, or about an individual's behaviour/actions.

A complaint may be made by a parent, student, staff member or a member of the wider community. While parents will often wish to raise issues on behalf of their children, there are other issues which pupils may choose to raise on their own behalf and which are best raised by them.

A complaint made by a staff member regarding his/her terms and conditions of employment will be managed through the Dispute Resolution Procedure outlined in the staff members Enterprise Agreement/Award.

## Complaints and appeals process

The College's Complaints Policy provides a process and contact details for internal and external assistance if the need arises. The Australian government also provides an Overseas Students' Ombudsman who offers a free, impartial and independent service for overseas students who may have a complaint or want to lodge an external appeal about a decision made by the College.

### How are complaints lodged? Who is responsible for management of the complaint?

Complaints may be made in person, by phone or by email.

The College community has access to information about the complaint management policy and procedures including how and where to make a complaint.

The complaint management policy and procedures are available on the College's website <http://www.penrhos.wa.edu.au/complaints.html>.

Reasonable assistance will be available to complainants with special needs, including complainants who are unable to lodge a complaint in writing.

If the complaint is lodged through the subject of the complaint, the process described below will be followed.

The preference is for complaints to be addressed at the 'local' level starting with the Teacher, or other staff member, who may be central to the complaint. Often positive discussion can overcome concerns raised, and staff are encouraged to make every effort to promptly resolve complaints in accordance with the principles outlined in this policy and relevant associated procedures. The staff member handling the complaint should ensure that the complaint handling process is documented and that communication with the complainant is maintained.

If the matter needs to be referred further, or the complainant is not satisfied, the appropriate Line Manager takes over the management of the complaint. The matter may then be referred on to the Head of Department (or other Line Manager) who in turn may refer the matter to the respective member of the College Leadership Group.

Before a formal complaint is considered, the College encourages staff to, wherever possible, discuss the issue or concern in person or by telephone with the complainant. Not only is this the most efficient way to resolve a problem but it is also the most service-focused option. When staff are empowered and an open, participative culture exists, successful relationships with students, parents, other staff, the College Council and the wider school community are fostered. Ultimately, well-handled complaints also contribute to the continuous process of College improvement.

Refer to the [Complaint Escalation Process](#)

If the complaint is lodged through the Junior, Secondary and Main Administration Reception areas, the following process will be followed.

The reception areas accept the complaint and then refer to the relevant member of the College Leadership Group.

Note: Complaints from members of the public will be referred directly to the Director of Marketing and Development for referral to the appropriate CLG member.

Once the complaint has been directed to the CLG member, that member is responsible for the management of the complaint, through;

- investigation of the complaint

- documentation of the complaint, and the complaint handling process used to achieve resolution
- communication with the complainant

If the complaint is not able to be resolved in a timely manner, the complaint needs to be escalated to the next level (Principal).

Refer to the [Complaint Escalation Process](#)

The procedures associated with this policy have been developed consistent with relevant industrial legislation and are in keeping with the Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of WA guidelines.

### **How must we respond?**

The overall focus of this policy and its accompanying procedure is on accessibility, local management, relationship building, and fair and timely resolution of complaints. This policy, and associated procedures, are underpinned by the following principles:

#### **Visibility and access**

- The College community has access to information about the complaint management policy and procedures including how and where to make a complaint.
- The complaint management policy and procedures will be available on the College's website <http://www.penrhos.wa.edu.au/complaints.html> and

#### **Responsiveness**

- All complaints will be acknowledged within a maximum of 48 hours and responded to in a timely manner. Complainants will receive regular progress reports during complex or lengthy investigations.
- Employees will be aware of and have access to the College's complaint management policy and procedures on the Portal. New employees will receive an overview of complaint management policy and procedure during induction.
- Complaints will be referred to the Principal or the College Council, where required.
- The Principal may determine that the College will not pursue vexatious, trivial or previously finalised issues after a complaint has been considered

#### **Integrity**

- The principles of natural justice will be applied to all complaints. Further information about natural justice is available in the complaint management procedures.
- The staff charged with managing the complaint will demonstrate fair and consistent decision-making.
- Complaints will be investigated without prejudice to any other right a complainant may have.

#### **Accountability**

- The College will keep all appropriate records of complaints made, through registration on a Complaints Management System. The complaint Case Manager is responsible for recording the details including: Dates, those involved, nature of the complaint, how the complaint was handled and the outcome. In the event that the complaint is not upheld, the report should clearly indicate this. The report should be stored in the appropriate files.
- Parties to a complaint will receive information that clearly explains how and why a decision was made.

- The College will maintain a 'Feedback Register' which includes information about substantiated complaints. This is maintained by the Principal for quality auditing purposes, and does not include personal details about the parties involved in a complaint.
- Complaint data will be analysed to identify systemic issues that need to be addressed in order to improve performance and reduce the number of complaints received.
- Where potential system improvements are identified, such feedback shall be provided to relevant areas of the College.
- The College will ensure that any relevant policies, practices or procedures are regularly reviewed as a result of the complaint as part of the College's continuous improvement.
- The College will ensure adequate resources, including staff and training, are available to manage complaints.

### **Complainant privacy and confidentiality**

- The privacy and confidentiality of complainants and any employee named in a complaint will be maintained

### **Escalation pathway**

Where a complaint is not resolved by the staff of Penrhos College up to and including the Principal, the College Council may become involved to facilitate the resolution process.

Where a complaint is not resolved within the College, the complaint may be referred to any appropriate external agencies, including the Moderator, Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Western Australia. This will not prevent the College from undertaking its own internal investigation.

### **Definitions**

#### **College Leadership Group**

A group of staff members that provide input on the strategic directions of the College, produce and implement the Annual Plan and associated projects, make policy recommendations and consider input from other committees.

#### **Complaint**

An expression or statement of discontent about a real or perceived problem.

#### **Complainant**

A student, staff member, parent or member of the community who has a complaint.

#### **Formal Complaint**

A formal complaint is a written signed document (usually a letter or email) that expresses a person's or a group's concerns about another person's or group's behaviours, actions, decisions or processes. Formal complaints tend to be matters of larger concern that may either commence in a formal manner or may be progressed to become a formal complaint from an informal complaint.

**Informal Complaint**

An informal complaint occurs when an approach is made by an individual or a group about a concern regarding another person or group's behaviour, actions, decisions or processes. An informal complaint tends to be the first step in the process in addressing an issue of concern and, if a relatively simple matter, may be resolved at this stage. An informal complaint may include an email.

**Investigation**

The process of reviewing an action or activity in response to a standard complaint

**Line Manager**

The person to whom a staff member directly reports in the line of management. For example, a teacher reports to a Head of Department, a Head of Department reports to the Dean of Teaching & Learning (DT&L) or the Head of Junior School and the DT&L reports to the Principal. The line manager is generally responsible for the recruitment, performance management, and direction of the staff member.

**Record of Complaint**

The documented record of a complaint received orally

**Subject of complaint**

The person or persons about whom the complaint is being made.

**Standard Complaint**

A complaint usually involving a single issue or concern.

**Vexatious Complaint**

A complaint intended to harass, annoy, delay or cause detriment