



Complaints Handling Policy

Statement

“Lutheran schools seek to be places of physical, social and psychological safety for all where legal requirements are fulfilled, and where caring, cooperative and respectful relationships contribute to supportive communities that reflect the values of the gospel of Jesus Christ and where there is a focus on love, compassion, forgiveness, service, humility, hope, quality, appreciation and restoration”. (LEA Valuing Safe Communities)

Loxton Lutheran School is committed to working in open, active partnerships with parents and care givers to resolve any concerns regarding the wellbeing, relationships, sense of belonging or academic progress within the school life of the students.

Rationale

At Loxton Lutheran School, we acknowledge and understand that positive, clear and effective processes for resolving concerns between the school and community members assist in the building of strong relationships, help dispel anxiety, and ultimately provide students with an enhanced learning environment.

We also view the raising of a complaint or grievance as a possible opportunity for improvement.

Scope

This policy applies to parents and caregivers of Loxton Lutheran School raising a complaint and to those who will respond.

Purpose

It is recognised that, from time to time, complaints may be received by the school from parents in our community. This policy sets out guidelines and processes by which such matters can be addressed respectfully, fairly, in a non-adversarial manner, expeditiously and with sensitivity to all concerned.

The procedures which follow, seek to provide a resolution for complaints made by parents. For the purpose of this policy, a complaint can arise if a parent believes, in good faith and with supporting information, that the school has:

- done something wrong
- failed to do something that it should have done
- acted unfairly, unreasonably, inappropriately or unprofessionally.

Exclusions: This policy does not address complaints about:

- Breaches of the Child Safe Codes of Conduct by current or former staff members, current or former students or other people on the Loxton Lutheran School premises or at Loxton Lutheran School events
- Conduct by a staff member that places any child or young person at risk, regardless of whether or not the child or young person is a student
- Inappropriate behaviour or sexual misconduct by a staff member or by another person the Loxton Lutheran School premises or at Loxton Lutheran School events

These are managed differently to other complaints. This is because of the additional confidentiality and privacy requirements surrounding these kinds of matters. We refer to these as Child Protection/Child Safety/Child Safeguarding related complaints. If your complaint is a Child Protection/Child Safety/Child Safeguarding complaint, please contact the principal directly, or if the principal is the subject of the complaint, contact the chairperson of the school board. Further information on these types of complaints can be found on our school website.

Procedure

Complaint resolution processes rely on people acting in good faith, exercising good judgement, being honest and open, focussing on the issues (not the person), communicating in a respectful manner and by observing our school values of Grace, Mercy and Hope.

To assist in resolving issues, the following procedures are to be followed:

- a) Stop and prayerfully reflect on the matter.
- b) **Make an appointment** to talk to the person with whom you have a concern. This may be the classroom teacher, principal or another staff member. When making the appointment, let the staff member know the subject you wish to discuss as this will facilitate the process and help to make the most productive use of time available to both parties. This makes the most productive use of time available for both parties. We do ask parents to respect the fact that staff are not always able to meet immediately due to commitments to the students and their learning. It will be our aim to organise a meeting time within 14 days of the initial communication being received.
- c) **Meet with the staff member** and use appropriate problem-solving and/or conflict resolution strategies to formulate positive action for the future. In the meeting it is important to:
 - Identify the facts
 - Explore why the facts present a problem
 - Share feelings
 - Remain positive
 - Remain respectful
 - Jointly commit to some future action and goals within the guidelines of school policy, procedure and by observing the school values of Grace, Mercy and Hope.

We recognise that the majority of complaints will be resolved at this first point of contact.

If it is believed that the complaint raised is still unresolved, it is important that this is stated to the staff member at the conclusion of the meeting.

- d) If the issues are not resolved, **make an appointment with the principal**. Advise them of what the subject is that you wish to discuss as this will facilitate the process.
- e) **Meet with the principal**. Results of this meeting may include the following:
 - Data is collected and the situation is monitored
 - Further discussions and problem solving with the people involved
 - An action plan is developed and documented, with mutually agreed timeframes for review
 - Outside professional support for the child or family may be sought/recommended

Throughout the initial meeting and subsequent process, there will be prompt investigation and open communication to ensure complaints are handled in a timely manner. Parties will jointly commit to the principles of fairness and natural justice.

All complaints reaching step e, having first properly followed steps a-d, will be recorded on the Complaints register.

If it is believed that the complaint is still unresolved, it is important to state that to the principal at the conclusion of this phase of the process.

If the matter relates to the principal, it is appropriate to communicate with the chairperson of the school board, after steps a-c have been followed.

- f) If still dissatisfied, **write to the chairperson of the school board**, who will try to resolve the situation further. The expectation of the chairperson of the school board will be that the above steps have been followed.

- g) If the issues remain unresolved within the school, contact can be made to the Executive Director of Lutheran Education South Australia (LESNW) or the Executive Director of Association of Independent Schools South

Australia (AISSA). Neither LESNW or AISSA will act as a mediator between parents and the school. They may, however, be able to provide general advice or assistance to help parents understand the school's position.

Steps a-d are considered appropriate towards the resolution of all complaints. If there is a case where a parent feels uncomfortable meeting with the appropriate school staff member, then an agreed mediator should be sought. This could be another staff member, pastor, chaplain or agreed professional.

It should be noted that neither the Minister for Education nor the Department for Education has any power to directly intervene in any complaints relating to the operations of a non-government school.

Accurate, appropriate and secure records will be kept at the school on its Complaints Register. The Complaints Register will be managed by the school.

If the matter is discussed in the presence of a student, it is important that the student understands that you have confidence that the issue will be resolved confidentially at the school level.

As far as possible and appropriate, due discretion will be respected and maintained by all parties throughout the resolution process. It is important that these complaints are kept confidential, and although support may be sought from a family member/friend/advocate, it is important to do so with discretion. The use of social media as a forum to air any form of complaint relating to the school, can be viewed as a serious breach of enrolment contract and failure to support the school's vision and values.

Whilst we welcome feedback from members of the school community, it is important that this feedback is shared appropriately, and in line with this policy. Denigration or defamation of the school, teacher or principal does not support the child's education as it undermines trust and confidence. The school can only deal with issues that are raised in line with this policy. If we do not receive information, in general, we assume all is well.

In the event that a parent persists in airing complaints in an inappropriate manner, the parent(s) will be required to attend a meeting with the principal where this policy will be highlighted as an expectation.

Due to the importance that Loxton Lutheran School places on the building and maintenance of positive community relationships, repeated deviation from this policy may result in the termination of enrolment from Loxton Lutheran School.

Special considerations

Any person charged with the implementation of this policy may, in circumstances which require special consideration, waiver from the procedures set out in this policy so as to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all relevant persons at the time of implementation, whilst ensuring that the spirit of this policy is not compromised.

Our commitment

Loxton Lutheran School commits to responding to, and investigating complaints promptly, sensitively and confidentially, seeking timely and peaceful resolution according to natural justice. The school also commits to viewing complaints as a possible means to continuous improvement, if the school is found to have erred.

Policy Review Date: March 2023

Adopted by the School Board: April 2023

Managing Parent Complaints

