

Concerns and Complaints Policy

1. Purpose

Ruyton Girls' School is committed to ensuring that all staff, students and members of the School community are treated with dignity, courtesy and respect in a learning and working environment. A member of the Ruyton community is entitled to voice concerns or make a complaint, whether informal or formal, as a result of experiencing behaviour by School staff or lack of satisfaction with School process that is not in accordance with the School's policies, values, expectations of conduct and/or Government regulations.

This Policy sets out the internal procedures that apply within the School for addressing concerns and complaints. The Policy is designed to ensure that throughout the School there is a transparent process for ensuring complaints and concerns are dealt with fairly, consistently and promptly, and are used to facilitate continuous improvement.

2. Scope

This Policy applies to all members of the Ruyton community including students, staff, parents/guardians, other stakeholders such as members of the local community, commercial suppliers and the families of students on the School's enrolment wait-list. International students should also refer to the Overseas Student Grievance Policy.

This Policy does not relate to concerns regarding child abuse. Refer to Ruyton's child safety reporting procedures for guidance. For complaints relating to staff grievances or employment matters refer to the Staff Grievances Policy. The School's Whistleblower Policy should be referred to in relation to protected disclosures.

3. Key Elements of the Policy

3.1 General Principles

A 'concern' is an issue of interest (because of its importance and effect) which is raised informally in order to improve or change a situation. A 'complaint' is an expression of grievance where the complainant is seeking redress or justice.

All members of the Ruyton community are entitled to voice concerns or make a complaint, either informally or formally, in order to ensure a safe, harmonious and effective learning environment is maintained. Concerns and complaints are welcomed and used within the School to facilitate continuous improvement.

In resolving a complaint, the School will give priority to student wellbeing and educational needs.

3.2 Expectations

The School expects a person raising a concern or complaint to:

- do so promptly, as soon as possible after the issue occurs;
- provide complete and factual information about the concern or complaint;
- 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 each other's point of view and value difference, rather than judge and blame;
- recognise that all parties have rights and responsibilities which must be balanced
- act in accordance with the Ruyton Code of Conduct.

The School will address any concerns or complaints received:

- efficiently;
- courteously;
- fairly;
- consistently;
- promptly, or within the timeline agreed with the person raising the concern or complaint;
- in accordance with due process, principles of natural justice and the existing regulatory framework.

3.3 Raising Concerns or Complaints

Concerns or complaints may be raised informally by contacting a relevant staff member by email, telephone or in person. It may be possible to resolve the concern or complaint by discussion, mediation or the instigation of a restorative process, facilitated by School staff. Ruyton community members are encouraged to initially raise concerns or complaints with the staff member closest to the issue. If necessary, the School will provide support for Ruyton community members with specific needs, for example, language translation.

All concerns and complaints will be noted and acted on promptly by the staff member who receives the initial advice.

A formal complaint may be made if no satisfactory resolution was obtained after an informal complaint, or if the matter is of sufficient seriousness for a formal complaint to be the first step. The formal complaint should be lodged in writing to the Principal at the School's address or by email to principal@ruyton.vic.edu.au. If the formal complaint is about the Principal it should be lodged with the President of the School Board, in writing to the School's address or by email to president@ruyton.vic.edu.au.

For contact details for any staff members, call Reception on 9819 2422. If you are unsure who to contact, ask to speak to the Deputy Principal or the Director of Business, Finance and Facilities.

The complainant has the right to be represented or supported by another person of their choice. The same right applies to a respondent. All parties involved in addressing a complaint may seek the services of a mediator when there is difficulty coming to an agreement.

3.4 Addressing Complaints

Formal procedures will need to be invoked when initial attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful and the person raising the complaint remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further.

The School will acknowledge all complaints made in writing. It will provide the complainant with a proposed timeline for investigating the complaint. The School will endeavour to acknowledge all complaints within two working days and commence the complaints process within five working days of their receipt.

Any formal complaint (other than about the actions or decisions of the Principal) will result in an investigation and will be carried out under the direction of the Principal, or a delegate of the Principal. Any investigation will be conducted in a fair and impartial manner. In the case of a complaint about the Principal, the President of the Ruyton Board will apply the same process.

The School will make every attempt to resolve a complaint as quickly as possible. If the complaint involves many Ruyton community members and a range of issues, the School will need more time to investigate and resolve it.

The complaints process will:

- encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible;
- ensure consistency in handling complaints;
- be impartial;
- be non-adversarial;
- allow swift handling with established time-limits for action and keeping people informed of the progress;
- ensure a full and fair investigation by an independent person where necessary;
- respect people's desire for confidentiality;

- address all the points at issue and provide an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary;
- treat all complaints with sensitivity;
- provide information to the School's senior staff so that services can be improved;
- ensure that no person is victimised as a result of raising a complaint.

3.5 Investigating Complaints

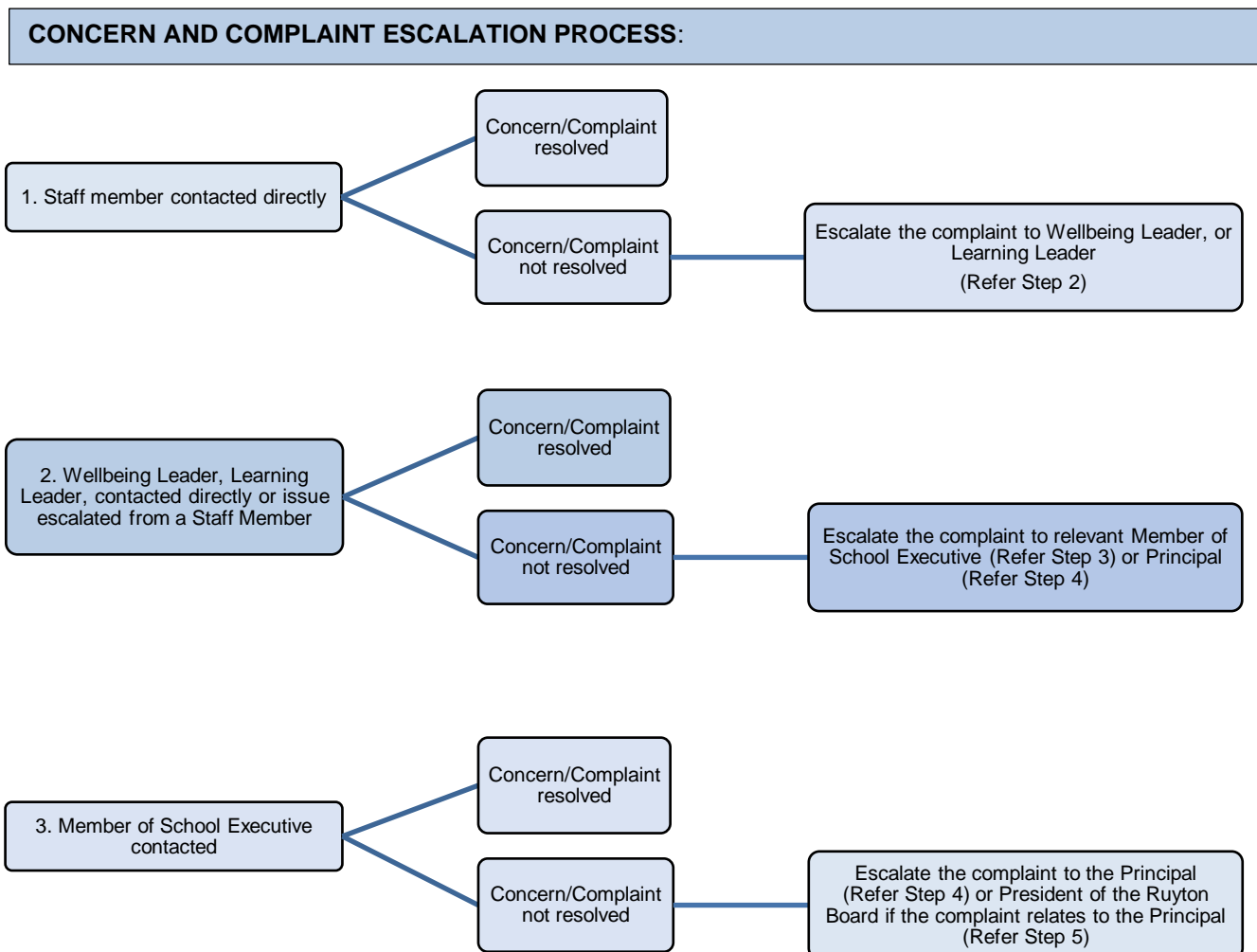
It is expected that at each stage, the person investigating the complaint makes sure that they:

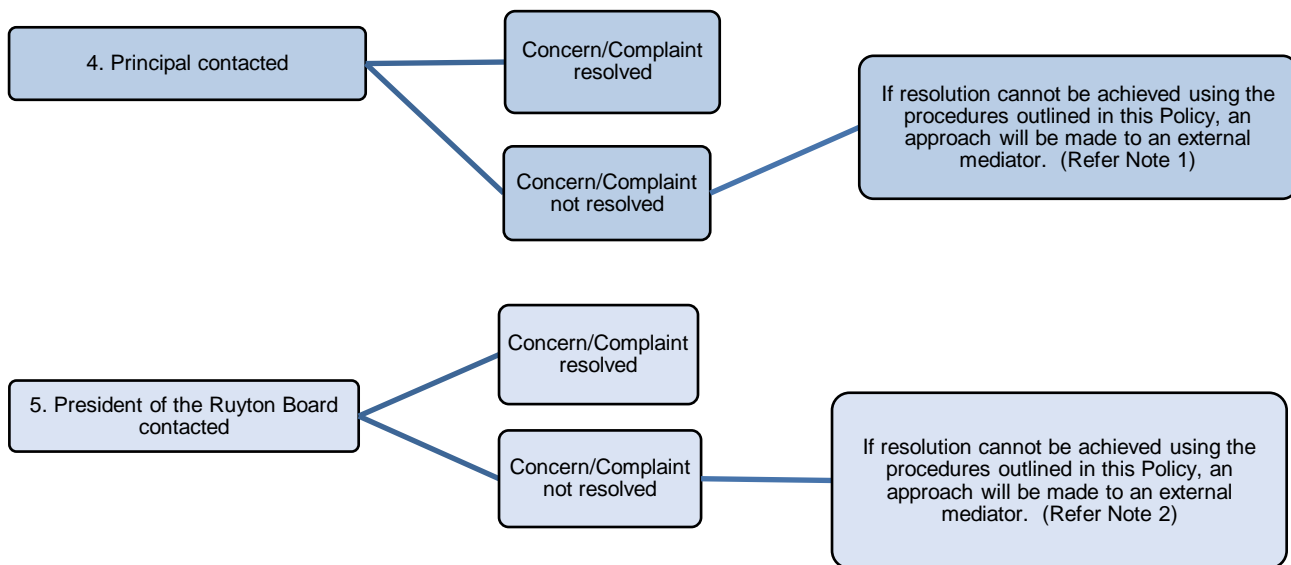
- establish and document what has happened so far, and who has been involved;
- clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved;
- meet with the complainant or contact them (if unsure or further information is necessary);
- clarify what the complainant feels would put things right;
- interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish;
- conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of all interviews.

If a formal complaint has been lodged against a person, that person will be informed of the nature and content of the complaint and will have the right to respond. At the conclusion of any investigation, the person will have access to information regarding the complaint and findings of the investigation.

3.6 Resolving Complaints

To ensure consistency, formal complaints are subject to review and escalation as detailed below:





NOTES:

1. The complainant may seek further resolution through relevant independent authorities, such as the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA), in the event they are not satisfied with the resolution of the complaint. The VRQA cannot intervene in contractual, financial or personal disputes between a complainant and the School.
2. The Board should not be approached, or become involved in hearing, assessing or adjudicating disputes between parents/carers and the School except where the complaint relates directly to the actions or decisions of the Principal.

At each stage in the process it is important to keep in mind ways in which a complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- an apology;
- an explanation;
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better;
- an assurance that the event complained of will not recur;
- an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again;
- an undertaking to review School policies in light of the complaint.

It is useful for complainants to be encouraged to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage. An admission that the School could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of negligence.

An effective procedure will identify areas of agreement between the parties. It is also of equal importance to clarify any misunderstandings that might have occurred as this can create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues. A mediation or restorative process may be instigated to assist in the resolution of a formal complaint if considered appropriate. This may be conducted by an external or internal facilitator, to be determined by the Principal (or President of the Board if the matter concerns the Principal) in consultation with the complainant.

Based on the issue, the designated person shall take immediate and appropriate corrective action.

If there appears to be no foundation to the allegation other than the complaint:

- no record shall be made of the allegation in either the complainer or complainant’s personnel records;
- if a foundation for the allegation exists, appropriate disciplinary action will follow;
- every effort shall be made to provide appropriate support for the complainant.

During the course of any complaints process, final sanctions will not be determined until the review has been completed. However, the Principal retains the right to suspend a student or staff member should the matter under review be of sufficient severity and/or involve safety concerns.

Where the grievance relates to a staff performance matter, principles of due process may apply as specified under the Ruyton Enterprise Agreement.

3.7 Timeframe for resolution

Complaints will be considered, and resolved, as quickly and efficiently as possible. To be effective, staff members will need to set realistic time limits for each action within each stage. However, where further investigations are necessary, new time limits can be set and the complainant given details of the new deadline and an explanation for the delay.

3.8 Referral of complaints

In some rare cases, it may not be possible to resolve the complaint to the satisfaction of the complainant using these procedures. In such cases complainants should discuss the options for further action with the Principal. Options may include review by the President of the Ruyton Board. The President will review the processes undertaken and policies applied with whatever parties are deemed appropriate to ensure that these policies and procedures have been appropriately applied. Should any of these requirements not be evident, the President may, at its sole discretion, investigate the facts and require the Principal to revisit the case.

If the matter still remains unresolved, then the individuals concerned or the School Board may refer the matter to a relevant body, such as Independent Schools Victoria (ISV), Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA), Victorian Institute of Teaching, Consumer Affairs Victoria or Human Rights Commission.

Where a complaint raised regarding the treatment of a student with a disability is unable to be resolved within the School, the complaint may be referred where appropriate to :

- the Australian Human Rights Commission, in relation to complaints regarding compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act or the Disability Standards for Education.
- the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission – in relation to complaints regarding compliance with the Equal Opportunity Act.

3.9 Record Keeping and Monitoring

When the concern or complaint is made verbally and is simple and easily resolved in a telephone call, a summary made by the relevant staff member recording details of the issue and the resolution of the issue may be all that is required.

The Principal will ensure a record is maintained of all written complaints/the response/outcome in a secure location within the School. The Principal will report annually to Ruyton Board the following data about concerns and complaints:

- number/type/resolution (internally or externally);
- average length of time to respond;
- any changes to School's practices and procedures made in light of complaints.

The Principal and Ruyton Board, as appropriate to their roles, will monitor parent concerns and complaints and consider issues raised through the complaints process, and any other relevant information from the parent opinion survey, when undertaking a review of school's policies, procedures and operations. As required the School Board will be briefed on specific issues. The Principal and Ruyton Board, as appropriate to their roles, will review its information about complaints made over time to identify common or recurring issues that may need addressing and assess the effectiveness of these and other procedures and whether they are being followed.

4. Related Policies

- Ruyton Code of Conduct
- Staff Grievances Policy
- Ruyton Child Safe Policy & Reportable Conduct Policy
- Whistleblower Policy
- Overseas Student Grievance Policy

APPROVED: Executive (January 2020)