

# ADDRESSING PARENT CONCERNS POLICY

## 1. Statement of Intent

Wilderness School ("School, we or us") is committed to creating a positive environment for our students, enrolled families, and our community.

It is recognised that, at times, concerns and complaints may be received by the School from this community and we are committed to supporting the community to raise concerns and resolve matters in a transparent and respectful manner.

## 2. Purpose

This policy sets out the School's practices and processes by which concerns and complaints can be addressed respectfully, professionally and with sensitivity to all concerned.

A concern or complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived situation or outcome.

The dissatisfaction may be based on a perception that the School has:

- done something wrong; or
- failed to do something it should have; or
- acted unfairly or unreasonably.

The concern or complaint may be about the School as a whole, about a specific department in the School or about an individual member of staff or student.

## 3. Scope

This policy applies to students, parents (including guardians and any person with whom a student normally or regularly resides (collectively referred to as "parents" in this policy)), in our community.

This policy does not cover concerns or complaints from staff about aspects of their work or employment conditions, nor does it cover complaints from suppliers, contractors and the public. The School will handle these matters in accordance with the appropriate Industrial Award and/or Enterprise Agreement and School's Grievance Policy.

This policy does not address issues of child protection where a separate policy applies.

## 4. Guiding Principles

Once a concern or complaint is raised, the School will endeavour to investigate and resolve it as quickly as possible to ensure they do not become ongoing disputes.

The following principles underpin the School's Managing Parent Concerns Policy:

- The School values feedback from parents, and concerns are received in a positive manner. Communication and resolution processes should always be based on the parties acting in good faith, exercising good judgement, being honest and open, and focusing on the issue and not the person(s)
- The health, safety and wellbeing of all members of the School community remain the highest priority
- Each concern or complaint is to be dealt with on its particular circumstances and merits and any settlements reached or determinations made through the resolution process will not necessarily constitute any binding precedent for future similar cases
- Every reasonable effort will be made by the School and its representatives to ensure that a parent who lodges a concern or complaint or anyone dealing with or involved in the complaint will not be treated unfairly, victimised, coerced or intimidated
- Parents are entitled to lodge a bona fide complaint with the School. This means complaints should be lodged in good faith and without frivolous, malicious or vexatious intent

- In responding to a complaint, informally or formally, every reasonable effort shall be made to ensure that natural justice and procedural fairness are afforded to all parties. This means, in practical terms, that:
  - All parties are entitled to be treated with respect and to be heard
  - All parties should participate fully in the resolution process to achieve an outcome that is realistic and reasonable
  - A person who is the subject of a complaint should be informed of the substance thereof and given a full opportunity to present their perspective
  - All parties have a right to seek advice and support
  - Investigations and proceedings are treated confidentially and must be conducted fairly, thoroughly and without bias or undue delay
  - Parties should provide all relevant material, complete and factual information, documents or other evidence relating to the complaint
  - Parties have a right to escalate the complaint should resolution of an issue not be achieved satisfactorily
  - All legislative obligations are met (for example, mandatory reporting, privacy, allegations of criminal activity)
  - Records are maintained and securely filed throughout any complaint process
  - A complaint register will be maintained
  - Regular reviews of complaint handling procedures are undertaken to ensure the effectiveness and responsiveness of School policy and procedures

Refer to Appendix 1: Resolving Complaints Flowchart.

### 5. Mandatory Reporting

Legal obligations relating to child abuse may limit the School's ability to undertake a comprehensive investigation. This particularly applies to the mandatory reporting requirements outlined in the [\*Children and Young People \(Safety\) Act 2017 \(SA\)\*](#). South Australia Police (SAPOL) involvement in some investigations may also limit the nature and scope of the School's investigation. In such cases, the School will seek guidance from SAPOL as to what can or cannot be done while the police are involved in this matter.

### 6. Informal Resolution of Concerns or Complaints Wherever Possible

Many concerns and/or complaints may be minor in nature, or readily resolved and often arise from genuine misunderstandings and/or issues relating to communication. In the vast majority of cases, these can be satisfactorily resolved informally.

The School supports complainants, wherever possible and as soon as practicable after a matter becomes of concern, to seek to resolve a complaint in an informal and amicable manner. This is best done through direct communication/discussion by and between the parties themselves (i.e a parent and teacher).

Formal procedures for the resolution of complaints should only be invoked when a matter is of very serious nature and/or cannot be resolved by the parties themselves through informal means.

### 7. Formal and Serious Complaints

Complaints that cannot otherwise be resolved pursuant to clause 6 above or are of a serious nature may be referred to or should be lodged formally to the following staff:

- Head of School
- Deputy Principal
- Principal (principal@wilderness.com.au)

In such instances, a parent may also seek advice or clarification from any of the aforementioned staff about the appropriate person(s) in the School to whom the concern or complaint might best be directed.

As soon as practicable after a formal complaint has been lodged, a process will be put in place by the School to investigate the complaint.

The investigative process in relation to formal complaint will include but not necessarily be limited to gathering relevant and material information relating to the complaint, meetings convened of the parties to discuss the complaint and to seek a resolution. If a resolution cannot be found, a determination will be made by the School, based on thorough investigation, as to whether or not to uphold the complaint.

If the complaint is substantiated, the evidence is inconclusive or if the complaint is found to not be substantiated, all parties will be formally advised accordingly, along with any follow-up counselling or other actions as the parties agree and/or the School deems appropriate and necessary in all the circumstances.

### 8. Referral of a Complaint to the Council of Governors

As a general rule the Chair of the Council of Governors and members of the Council of Governors are not directly involved in the first instance with the receipt, investigation or resolution of a serious complaint other than grievances within the School Council itself.

In instances where a complaint is about the Principal, a person may, if they feel the matter cannot otherwise be resolved or feels it is appropriate to do so, lodge a formal complaint with the Chair of the Council of Governors (feedback@wilderness.com.au). In turn, and in consultation with the complainant, the Chair of the Council of Governors will expeditiously take all reasonable steps to have the complaint fully investigated and to facilitate a resolution.

In other exceptional and special circumstances, a member of the School community may make a direct approach to the Chair of the Council of Governors to bring his/her attention to a matter of concern, to formally lodge a complaint or refer a complaint where the resolution processes within the School have failed or are otherwise inappropriate. In such circumstances, the Chair of the Council of Governors will take advice from the appropriate persons and make a determination as to how the grievance should thereafter be dealt with.

### 9. Documentation/Record Keeping

Accurate, appropriate and secure records will be kept at the School on Verus by the person responsible for overseeing or managing the resolution for a particular complaint. The record will include

- Date when issue was first raised;
- Names of parent(s)
- Name of student(s)
- Detailed statement of concern/complaint such as nature of complaint, identity of person involved and time of allegation
- Description of the procedures applied and the time frame for reporting on the outcomes of an investigation- Statement of outcomes
- Names of staff member(s) handling complaint

It should be noted that documents that may be created during the course of investigations and handling a complaint might have to be produced in legal proceedings. It is important this be borne in mind at all times.

Depending on the complaint, the School may inform their insurance company of the issue, as the insurer may have requirements about the management of the complaint.

### 10. Referral of a Complaint to an External Body

Where a serious complaint is not or cannot be resolved within the School, the parties may seek assistance from outside professional agencies or other relevant judicial bodies in order that a further attempt can be made to resolve the matter. This is subject to the following important provisions:

- The Association of Independent Schools of South Australia (AISSA) will not act as a mediator between parents and the School.
- Neither the Minister for Education, Training and Skills nor the Department for Education has any power to directly intervene in any complaints relating to the operations of the School.

### 11. Confidentiality, Discretion and the School's Duty or Obligations to Notify or Report

As far as possible and appropriate, due discretion will be respected and maintained by all parties throughout the resolution process, consistent with the School's relevant Code of Conduct. This is expected where persons are required to be informed on a 'need to know' basis or where investigative, statutory or legal requirements stipulate that matters be disclosed, reported or discussed. Therefore, there can be no overriding legal obligation or right with respect to confidentiality.

Where complaints are made in circumstances where an alleged crime may have been committed or the matter falls under the Reporting Abuse and Neglect provisions, the Police or similar outside agencies (i.e. Child Abuse Report Line) will be contacted and formally advised.

### 12. Anonymous Complaints

If a parent chooses to make a complaint without disclosing their identity, this will limit the options for proper and thorough investigation and resolution. It also raises issues in relation to procedural fairness for those who have a complaint made about them as they have a right to know the particulars of the complaint and to respond. The School therefore cannot guarantee that anonymous complaints can or will be dealt with. Complainants are always encouraged to identify themselves.

### 13. Withdrawal of a Complaint

A parent may withdraw a complaint at any stage of the resolution process. If a complaint is withdrawn, the matter will be deemed to be closed, unless the School, at its discretion and in all the circumstances, wishes to continue to address a matter raised.

### 14. Outcomes of a Complaint

A matter is dealt with successfully if all parties find the outcomes(s) acceptable.

Resolutions of complaints will be communicated to all parties. Resolutions are the result of assessment of specific circumstances, School policy and practices, School expectations and outcome for students.

Should any party not be satisfied with the outcome, he/she can choose to pursue the matter further.

### 15. Review of Policy

This Policy will be reviewed every two years or sooner as required and is made available to all staff (via the School's network) and Parents of the School (via the School's website).

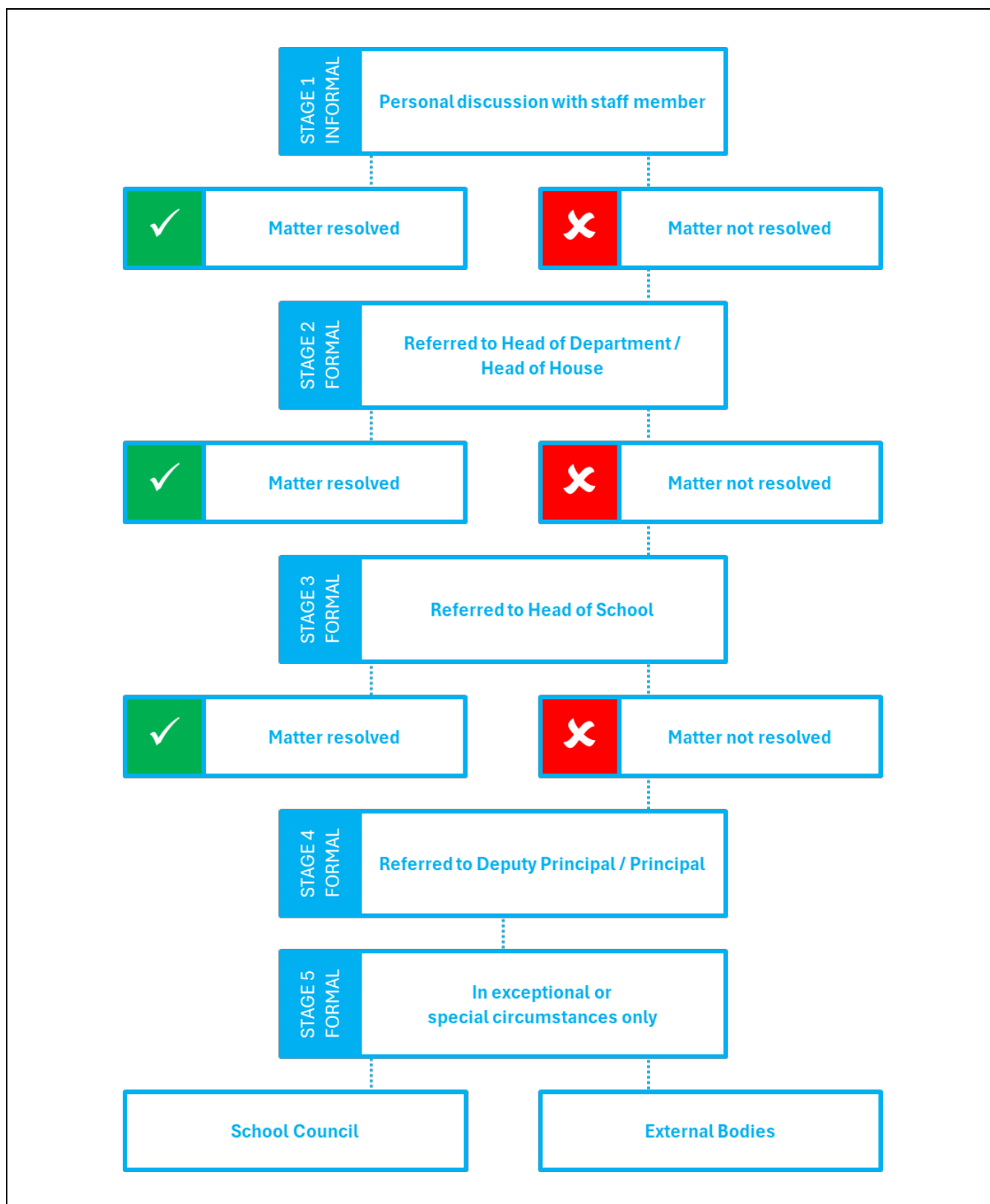
### 16. Applicable Standards and Legislation

- [Children and Young People \(Safety\) Act 2017 \(SA\)](#)
- [Privacy Act 1988 \(cth\)](#)
- [Education and Children's Services Act 2019 \(SA\)](#)
- [Equal Opportunity Act 1984 \(SA\)](#)
- State Government Funding Deed

### 17. Related Documents

- Privacy Policy
- Child Protection Policy
- Parent Code of Conduct
- Student Code of Conduct
- Staff Code of Conduct

## Appendix 1: Resolving Complaints Flowchart



**Please note that grievances that occur between one parent and another, fall outside our jurisdiction.**

Parents must not approach students with grievances as this is a breach of the Child Protection Policy.

Wilderness will treat concerns and complaints with respect and sensitivity. Although we endeavour to deal with concerns and complaints with appropriate discretion, we reserve our right to disclose details of the matter to other persons who in our opinion need to know them, in order to facilitate the resolution of the concern or complaint.