

Goora Gan Steiner School Complaints Handling Procedures

Purpose:	The purpose of this policy is to ensure that student, parent and employee complaints and disputes are dealt with in a responsive, efficient, effective and fair way.	
Scope:	Students, parents and employees, including full-time, part-time, permanent, fixed-term and casual employees, as well as contractors, volunteers and people undertaking work experience or vocational placements.	
Status:	Approved	Supersedes:
Authorised by:	School Board	Date of Authorisation: May 2021
References:	• Child Protection Policy • Privacy Policy	
Review Date:	Annually	Next Review Date: May 2022
Policy Owner:	GGSS Board	

1. Statement

Goora Gan Steiner School (GGSS) aims to provide a fair, equitable, legal and ethical environment for all employees, staff and students. The aim of this policy is to ensure there is a transparent and consistent process to resolve issues as quickly and fairly as possible.

This document outlines the procedures undertaken at this school to manage complaints in accordance with the Goora Gan Steiner School Complaints Handling Policy.

Complaints come to the School Facilitator and other school staff in many forms. It recognises that complaints are usually, in the first instance, made verbally to staff and are often and desirably resolvable at first contact. Complaints can be from parents/carers, community, staff or students. All complaints are handled in a positive and open way, and complaints resolution should focus on maintenance of relationship and be addressed with the least amount of formality that is appropriate.

This excludes any complaint that is related to harm to a child - these complaints must be referred immediately to the School Facilitator. The School Facilitator will act on reported harm to a child as required under Queensland Legislation and Law.

The process is outlined in the Goora Gan Steiner School Child Protection Policy & Child Risk Management Strategy which can be found on our website.

Receiving a complaint

- complaints related to teaching staff or educational operations should be referred to the Education Manager;
- complaints either related to or unresolved with the Education Manager, or relating to school operations or administration, should be referred to the School Facilitator;
- complaints relating to the School Facilitator should be made to the Board Chair

All complaints are to be delegated to the appropriate staff member for resolution.

Wherever possible, complaints are initially managed and resolved by the person either receiving the complaint or to whom the complaint is directed.

Unresolved complaints are referred to the relevant staff member's immediate supervisor as listed.

If at any time a delegated staff member believes that they will not be able to resolve the complaint at their level, they will immediately refer the complaint to the School Facilitator.

2. Documentation

Goora Gan Steiner School documents all complaints. Complaints are recorded and reported to the School Facilitator as soon as practicable after receiving the complaint.

The record of the complaint:

- uses objective language clearly stating the facts,
- contains information in chronological order as practically possible,
- uses quotation marks, where appropriate and necessary,
- is neatly and legibly written in biro/pen or in print in clear unambiguous language,
- includes, where necessary, initialled and dated corrections,
- includes signature, designation of the author, and time and date of the incident/complaint.

If the complaint is not resolved at the first point of contact, the complaint is acknowledged within five working days by telephone, in person, by email, or in writing.

Documents related to the complaint are kept and stored in accordance with the Goora Gan Steiner School Privacy Policy.

3. Complaints Management Phases

There are four key phases in handling a complaint, with the option of a fifth phase for review of a complaint outcome:

Phase 1. Receiving and clarifying the complaint

Phase 2. Deciding how to handle the complaint

Phase 3. Finding out about the complaint
Phase 4. Making a decision about the complaint
Phase 5. Review

Phase 1 - Receiving and clarifying the complaint

Any member of staff can receive a complaint, though preferably complaints are delegated to staff as outlined in the 'Receiving a Complaint' section.

All complaints are received in the following manner:

- being respectful and helpful,
- giving the person your undivided attention,
- not being defensive, apportioning blame,
- remaining positive,
- not perceiving anger as a personal attack.

When a staff member receives a verbal complaint they:

- listen carefully to the issues being raised,
- summarise the issues to clarify and check that they understand what the complainant is telling you,
- empathise and acknowledge the complainant's feelings,
- find out what the complainant wants to happen as a result of the complaint,
- tell the complainant that they may use the support of a third party in progressing the complaint, if they feel this is needed,
- resolve the complaint if possible, or assure the complainant that an appropriate staff member will address their complaint,
- advise the complainant what will happen with their complaint,
- thank them for their complaint.

Complaints are sometimes made with the assistance of an advocate, interpreter or by a third party (as agreed between the complainant and the School Facilitator). In this case staff will receive and clarify a complaint from more than one person.

Many complaints are resolved at the first point of contact with information and/or an explanation, together with an apology and recognition of the effect the situation has had on the person. Some complainants may also want an undertaking that action will be taken to prevent the problem recurring.

When the complaint is not resolved immediately, the complaint is referred to the applicable person as soon as is practicable.

A member of staff who receives a verbal complaint that is not resolved informs the complainant of the further options of:

- putting their complaint in writing, or,
- assisting the member of staff to record, in writing, the particulars of their complaint.

In general, if the complainant agrees to put the complaint in writing, the member of staff takes no further action unless or until a written complaint is received. However, if the complaint relates to a report about harm (whether physical/emotional/sexual) of a student under 18 years, the process should be directed to the Goora Gan Steiner School Child Protection Policy – all action will be as per legislated requirements and acted upon without delay.

Once the complainant indicates that they would like to register a formal complaint verbally, the member of staff makes a written outline of the issues concerned. The record is read to the complainant, with opportunity for appropriate amendments and the complainant is asked to sign, where possible, the written version of the complaint. The staff member also signs (indicating their personal designation) and dates the complaint.

No signature is required for verbal complaints taken over the phone, but the complainant is asked to provide verbal confirmation of the issues that have been recorded.

If a complainant refuses to sign or confirm a written recording of a verbal complaint, the staff member notes the refusal on the written complaint. The complainant is told that this refusal will be noted and that the process will be reliant on the staff member's interpretation and notes only. The complainant may not, at a later date, make another complaint based on a lack of satisfaction with this record of complaint.

Receiving a written complaint

When a written complaint is received it is date-stamped and forwarded to the School Facilitator.

Receiving an anonymous complaint

When an anonymous complaint is received, the complainant is told of the possible limitations associated with making an anonymous complaint.

Phase 2 - Deciding how to handle the complaint

When a staff member receives a complaint, they:

- begin the process of making an assessment about a complaint from the moment the complaint is received,
- make an assessment in the first instance about whether the issue can be dealt with as a concern or a complaint,
- if they are not the School Facilitator, refer the complainant or the complaint to the School Facilitator for addressing.

The School Facilitator decides whether to:

- take no further action,
- attempt to resolve the complaint through resolution strategies such as mediation,
- initiate an investigation of the complaint, within the school, if further information is required.
- refer the complaint to an external agency or Board of Directors

Co-ordination of complaints

The School Facilitator has the final responsibility for the management of all complaints that relate to school management issues under his/her jurisdiction. The complaint can be referred to another staff member in the school for action (for example, the Education Manager or a nominated staff member).

Record of complaint

The School Facilitator ensures that records of a complaint and any referral of a complaint are logged and kept securely.

Phase 3 - Finding out about the complaint

The School Facilitator or delegate gathers all the necessary facts about the complaint while keeping in mind the principles of natural justice of all parties concerned.

The School Facilitator or delegate investigates complaints by:

- collecting and analysing information relevant to the matter,
- working collaboratively with all people involved,
- finding the facts relating to the matter,
- identifying any contributing factors to the matter,
- documenting the investigation report or outcome.

Phase 4 - Making a decision about the complaint

Based on the facts gathered in Phase 3 about the complaint, the School Facilitator or delegate makes a decision on the complaint.

Notifying the complainant of the decision

Within 28 days of the receipt of the complaint, the School Facilitator provides the complainant with either:

- a written response, including reasons for the decision, or,
- a written notification that their complaint has been referred to the School Board of Directors.

Phase 5 - Review Phase

If the complainant is not satisfied with this response, they are encouraged to discuss it further with the School Facilitator, or to pursue the matter with the School Board Secretary if they wish.

If at any stage throughout the process if the matter is considered an emergency, legal, ethical or safety issue, Goora Gan Steiner School staff are encouraged to use their best judgement to expedite the complaint process.