



Hughenden State School Complaints Management Procedure

Complaints come to principals and other school staff in many forms. Complaints can be from parents/carers, community, staff or students.

This document outlines the procedures undertaken at this school to manage complaints. Complaints management at this school is also underpinned by section 46 of the [Education \(General-Provisions\) Act 2006 \(Qld\)](#), Education Queensland's [Complaints Management - State Schools](#) and [Making a Complaint](#) located on the department's website.

All complaints are to be handled in a positive, respectful, and open manner.

The following applies

1. Documentation

- ✓ Individual staff can take complaints including the principal
- ✓ All staff receiving complaints are, in the first instance, to record them using the guidelines below
- ✓ If the complaint is resolved at the time of notification then that is to be included in the record of complaint
- ✓ Complaints once recorded are then reported to the complaints manager as soon as practicable after receipt of the complaint
- ✓ The complaints manager will then notify the principal
- ✓ The principal will determine any other action to be taken
- ✓ All complaints documentation will be retained on file by the school

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 typed, or neatly and legibly written, or in print, using blue or black biro / pen, in clear unambiguous language
- includes corrections, if or where necessary, that are also initialled and dated
- includes the name and designation of the author, their signature, the time and date of the incident / complaint and the complainants' details, including their full name.

The following is the process to record the complaint (using the information above);

1. **Staff without OneSchool access** record the verbal complaint using the “**Record of Verbal Complaint**” form including whether a resolution was achieved during the initial contact, this is then forwarded to the complaints manager
2. **Staff with access to One-School** record a verbal complaint as a record of contact under the complainants' contact information referring to the template “Record of Verbal Complaint” as a prompt for the details to be included in the OneSchool record and whether a resolution was achieved during the contact (this would be listed as actions to be taken and by when). The complaints manager and the principal are to be added using the “staff referral” tab.
3. **Should the complaint be received in writing** then the receiving staff member records this as a contact using process 1 or 2 above (depending upon access) stating that a written complaint has been received and forwards this to the complaints manager (using the OneSchool staff referral process or hand delivered using the completed template).

If the complaint is not resolved at the first point of contact, the complaint will be acknowledged within five working days by telephone, in person, by email, or in writing, either by the principal or a person delegated by the principal to do so.

Documents related to the complaint will be kept and stored in accordance with the relevant departmental policies and procedures. Please refer to [Information Management](#) and [Access to Records](#) Held in Schools.

2. 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 if required:

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.

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 must:

- **listen** carefully to the issues being raised
- **summarise** the issues to clarify and check that you 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, 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 may occasionally be made with the assistance of an advocate, interpreter or by a third party (as agreed between the complainant and the principal). In this case staff will receive and clarify a complaint from potentially more than one person.

Many complaints are resolved at the first point of contact with information and/or an explanation, with recognition of the effect the situation has had and, depending on the outcome, in some instances, an apology may be required and / or an undertaking of the action to be taken to prevent the problem from recurring.

When the complaint is not resolved immediately, the complaint is referred to the principal 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 who is handling the matter, to record in writing the particulars of their complaint.

In general, unless the complainant agrees to put the complaint in writing, no further action will be forthcoming 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 attending a state educational institution, refer to [Student Protection](#), for detailed obligations of all Education Queensland employees.

Once the complainant indicates that they would like to register a **formal complaint verbally**, the staff member makes a written outline of the issues concerned (see template Record of Verbal Complaint). 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, for example, 'Year 7 Teacher, Hughenden State School') 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 (**see template Record of Verbal Complaint**).

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 complaints manager who will forward this to the principal.

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 the staff member decides** that it is a complaint then they must follow the process as outlined in **Documentation point 1** above

The principal decides whether to:

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

Co-ordination of complaints

The principal has the final responsibility for the management of all complaints that relate to school management issues under the principal's jurisdiction. **The complaint can be referred to** another staff member in the school for action (for example, the deputy principal, business services manager or nominated staff member).

If the complaint relates to departmental policy, or a departmental policy position, the complainant is advised to take their complaint to the relevant regional office.

If the complaint is in relation to official misconduct, student protection or a perceived breach of privacy, the complaint is directed to the Ethical Standards Unit and the Legal Administrative Law Branch.

Record of complaint

The principal ensures that records of a complaint and any referral of a complaint are kept for either internal or external review.

Phase 3 - Finding out about the complaint

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

The principal 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
- consulting the relevant DET Procedure Register on issues that relate to the complaint
- 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 principal or delegate makes a decision on the complaint.

Notifying the complainant of the decision

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

- a written response, including reasons for the decision, or
- a written notification that their complaint has been referred to an internal or external agency.

Phase 5 Review Phase

If the complainant is not satisfied with this response, they are encouraged to discuss it further with the school principal and / or advised to contact the principal's supervisor, the Assistant Regional Director, at the North Queensland Regional Office. Further review of the decision is available from the Queensland Ombudsman as described in [Making a Complaint](#).

Principal Hughenden State School

Date /08/16

Regional Director North Queensland Region

Date /08/16

Date of review 22/08/16