

COMPLAINTS HANDLING POLICY

Purpose	The purpose of this policy is to provide written processes about receiving, assessing, investigating and otherwise dealing with complaints. ¹	
Scope	This policy applies to any person directly affected by the subject of a complaint. Examples may include students, parents/carers, 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. This policy also applies to staff and parents/carers of our Early Childcare Centre (ECC).	
Responsibility	School Principal	
References	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Regulations 2017 (Qld) • Fair Work Act 2009 • Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (Qld) • Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) • Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 (Qld) • Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986 (Cth) • Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth) • Age Discrimination Act 2004 (Cth) • Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth) • Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth) • Standards Australia, Guidelines for complaint management in organizations (ISO 10002:2022, NEQ) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The River School Enterprise Bargaining Agreement or equivalent • The River School Enrolment Contract • The River School Complaints Handling Procedure • The River School Child Protection Policy • The River School Work Health and Safety Policy • The River School Behaviour Management Policy • The River School Anti-bullying Policy • The River School Code of Conduct • The River School Anti-Discrimination Policy • The River School Sexual Harassment Policy • The River School Disability Discrimination Policy • The River School Workplace Bullying Policy • The River School Privacy Policy • Ananda Marga Education Ltd Board Charter / Constitution 	
Status	Approved	Supersedes Complaints Handling Policy 2023
Authorised by:	Board Chair	
Date of Authorisation	June 2024	Next Review Date: June 2025
Review Cycle	Annually	Version ID: CHP2024
Policy Owner	AME Ltd Board	

¹ [Education \(Accreditation of Non-State Schools\) Regulations 2017, s.7](#)

1. POLICY STATEMENT

The River School acknowledges the right of students, parents/guardians, staff and others to complain when dissatisfied with the school's services, including an action, inaction or decision of the school. The school encourages constructive criticism and complaints. The River School is committed to ensuring that complaints received are handled in a responsive, efficient, consistent, effective, transparent and fair way.

The River School will ensure employees can recognise, receive, and appropriately refer complaints to the informal or formal complaints procedure.

The River School recognises that time spent on handling complaints can be an investment in better service to students and parents/guardians and a better culture for employees, and views complaints as part of an important feedback and accountability process.

2. DEFINITIONS

Complaint	An expression of dissatisfaction made to or about the school, related to the school's services, staff or the handling of a complaint, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required. ²
Informal Complaint	A complaint about a matter that is likely to be simple, straight forward, easily manageable, or minor, where a simple or quick resolution is appropriate such as discussion of the matter with a relevant staff member.
Formal Complaint	A complaint about a matter that is serious, complex or may pose a threat to the health and safety of any person. Examples include serious allegations or breaches of policy, complaints against a senior staff member, including the principal or an informal complaint that could not be resolved informally. Assessment of the complaint is required by <<add role or roles e.g. a relevant member of the senior leadership team>>.
Complainant	The person, organisation or their representative making a complaint. ³
Respondent	The person who is referred to in a complaint by a complainant as the person responsible for their concerns or who can best respond to their concern.

3. COMPLAINTS THAT MAY BE RESOLVED UNDER THIS POLICY

The River School encourages the prompt lodging of concerns regarding sexual harassment, child protection, discrimination, workplace bullying and privacy breaches as well as more general complaints that include areas such as:

- the school, its employees or students have done something wrong
- the school, its employees or students have failed to do something that they should have done
- issues of student, parent or employee behaviour that are contrary to the school's *Code of Conduct Policy* and/or *Student Behaviour Management Policy* including inappropriate staff conduct as reported by a student.⁴
- issues related to learning programs, assessment and reporting of student learning
- issues related to communication with students or parents or between employees
- issues related school fees and payments

² Standards Australia, Guidelines for complaint management in organizations (ISO 10002:2018, NEQ), s.4.3

³ Standards Australia, Guidelines for complaint management in organizations (ISO 10002:2018, NEQ), s.4.2

⁴ Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Regulation 2017 s.16(2)(a)

- issues relating to non-compliance with a process outlined in school policies or procedures, for example the child protection policy, discrimination policy, or privacy policy.⁵

Student complaints may be brought by students or by parents on behalf of their children, as appropriate in the circumstances.

3.1. ISSUES OUTSIDE OF THIS POLICY

The following matters are outside of the scope of this policy and should be managed as follows:

- Child protection concerns including allegations of sexual abuse, likely sexual abuse or harm to children should be dealt in accordance with the school's Child Protection Policy
- Student bullying complaints should be dealt with under the *Bullying Prevention Policy*.
- Student discipline matters, including matters involving suspension or expulsion, should be dealt with under the *Student Behaviour Management Policy*.
- employee complaints related to their employment should be directed to the Principal or Deputy.
- Student or employee violence or criminal matters should be directed to the Principal who will involve the police as appropriate.
- Disputes between Ananda Marga Education members and Ananda Marga Education Ltd board members should be dealt with in accordance with the AMEL Constitution and the *Complaints against directors or against the Board* policy.
- Formal legal proceedings should be managed as appropriate in the circumstances.
- Complaints relating to the education and training services provided by the school to an overseas student should be dealt with in accordance with the Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000 and National Code and the school's Overseas Student's Complaints and Appeals Policy and Process.

4. COMPLAINTS HANDLING PRINCIPLES

The River School is committed to managing complaints according to the following (which include principles of procedural fairness):

- complaints will be taken seriously, dealt with fairly and objectively, without judgement and addressed in a reasonable timeframe
- complaints should be resolved with as little formality and disruption as possible, having regard to the nature of the complaint
- interested parties to the complaint (for example, the complainant and any respondent) will be heard and/or may provide relevant information in relation to the complaint
- confidentiality and privacy will be maintained as much as possible
- the complainant and any respondent will be offered support as appropriate
- victimising behaviour towards a complainant, respondent or other people associated with the complaint, will not be tolerated
- complainants that lodge a complaint on reasonable grounds will not suffer any other reprisals on the basis of the lodging the complaint
- anonymous complaints will be treated on their merits – see section 13
- mediation, negotiation and informal resolution are optional alternatives
- the school will keep records of all complaints
- the AME Board will be informed immediately of any claim for legal redress
- the school's insurer will be informed if a complaint could be connected to an insured risk
- all processes for handling complaints will align with the school's Neohumanist philosophy.

⁵ Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Regulation 2017 s.16(5)

5. RESPONSIBILITIES

5.1. THE SCHOOL

The school has the following role and responsibilities:

- develop, implement, promote and act in accordance with the school's Complaints Handling Policy and procedures
- appropriately communicate the school's Complaints Handling Policy and procedures to students, parents and employees
- ensure that the Complaints Handling procedures are readily accessible by staff, students and parents
- upon receipt of a complaint, manage the complaint in accordance with the *Complaints Handling Policy*.
- ensure that appropriate support is provided to all parties to a complaint
- take appropriate action to prevent the victimisation or action in reprisal against the complainant, respondent or any person associated with them
- appropriately implement resolutions
- appropriately train relevant employees
- keep records
- conduct a review/audit of the Complaints Register in regular intervals
- monitor and report complaints to the Ananda Marga Education Board
- report to the school's insurer when that is relevant
- refer to the school's governing body immediately any claim for legal redress.

5.2. ALL PARTIES TO A DISPUTE

The complainant and respondent both have the following role and responsibilities:

- apply and comply with the school's Complaints Handling Policy and procedures
- provide complete and factual information in a timely manner
- expect that the complaint will be dealt with fairly and objectively; in a timely manner; with procedural fairness
- provide complete and factual information in a timely manner
- not provide deliberately false or misleading information
- not make frivolous or vexatious complaints
- act in good faith, and maintain a mutually beneficial relationship of trust and cooperation
- act in a calm, courteous manner and non-threatening manner
- acknowledge that a common goal is to achieve an outcome acceptable to all parties
- recognise that all parties have rights and responsibilities which must be balanced
- maintain and respect the privacy and confidentiality of all parties
- show respect and understanding of each other's point of view and value differences, rather than judge and blame
- not victimise or act in reprisal against any party to the dispute or any person associated with them.

5.3. EMPLOYEES RECEIVING AND/OR MANAGING COMPLAINTS

Employees receiving complaints have the following role and responsibilities:

- act in accordance with the school's Complaints Handling Policy and procedures
- refer the complainant to the school's Complaints Handling Policy and provide additional information as necessary
- maintain confidentiality as far as possible
- keep appropriate records
- forward complaints to more senior employees, including the Principal, if the complaint cannot be resolved at the initial level or if it involves serious issues that require the involvement of more senior employees
- not victimise or act in reprisal against the complainant, respondent or any person associated with them.

6. PARENTAL / VOLUNTEER COMPLAINTS

If a parent or volunteer makes a complaint to a member of staff, it should be dealt with quickly and honestly by the staff member if they feel confident to do so.

If the staff member does not feel confident about handling the complaint, they should consult the Principal or Deputy.

If the complaint is about an area that lies outside a staff member's responsibility, they should report it to the Principal and/or Deputy immediately.

Matters incapable of resolution at a particular level should be referred to the appropriate senior person, with parents kept informed of the action being taken.

If a parent wishes to go straight to the Principal with their concerns, this should be respected. However, it should be explained that the Principal might not be able to respond until they have consulted the staff members who can help.

The Principal will share serious complaints with the Chairperson of the Board. If a serious complaint is made about the Principal, parents are encouraged to write directly to the Chairperson of the Board chair@riverschool.com.au

In the case of written responses to a complaint, the Principal should be consulted before the response is sent. The Principal is to be forwarded and cc'ed into all correspondence involving complaints. Copies of all emails should be printed and given to the Principal.

The person handling the complaint must be clear about the nature of the complaint before responding. If it is not immediately obvious:

- The parent or volunteer may need more time to explain
- They could be asked to put their complaint in writing
- It may be helpful to discuss the process and possible outcomes.

6.1. COMPLAINTS will BE HANDLED SERIOUSLY

It is the policy of the school that all complaints will be acknowledged immediately, or within five working days if the matter is complex. Parents will be kept informed about what is happening to their concern or complaint, and, if a more detailed response is needed, by what date it will be received. All issues will be dealt with as quickly as possible.

7. EMPLOYEE COMPLAINTS

Complaints related to school matters or concerns between employees may be dealt with under this policy following the *Complaints Procedure* — point 9.

An employee making a complaint against another staff member must lodge it with the Principal or Deputy.

Employee complaints involving, e.g. school policies, compliance, administrative procedures, supervision and assessment must be made in writing and lodged with the Principal. The Principal will follow the *Complaints Procedure* — point 9, to deal with the complaint.

8. MANAGING COMPLAINTS

When a complaint is lodged with the school, the following processes will be implemented:

- promptly acknowledge receipt of the complaint
- a record of the complaint will be made in the *Complaints Register*
- the complaint may be shared with teachers, staff and/or the School Board if appropriate
- confidentiality and privacy will be maintained as much as possible
- complaints will be addressed in a timely manner.

9. COMPLAINTS REGISTER

The River School will maintain a complaint register with details such as the date, source and description of complaints, the employee managing the complaint, the actions taken, outcome and the date the complaint was closed.

The complaint register will be stored securely.

Last review date: June 2024

All complaints shall be entered onto the complaint register as soon as practicable after the complaint is received. The complaint register will not contain complaints about the Principal. Records of complaints about the Principal will be maintained by the Board with access restricted to the Board.

To safeguard confidentiality and maintain the integrity of the complaint process, access to the entire complaint register will be limited to the Principal and Business Manager.

The Principal may authorise the sharing of specific, relevant entries from the complaint register with other designated staff members (such as the senior leadership team), provided measures are taken to protect the confidentiality of all parties involved, particularly ensuring that respondents to a complaint do not gain inappropriate access to information about the allegations against them.

10. COMPLAINT HANDLING PROCEDURE

10.1. LODGING A COMPLAINT

- a) Complaints can be lodged with the most appropriate staff member at the local level, for example, the initial contact point for many complaints is the student's relevant classroom teacher.
- b) Complaints can be lodged through various methods, including:
 - i. Phone
 - ii. Email
 - iii. In-person (by appointment)
- c) If the complainant is unsure where to direct their complaint, they can contact the school's administration office for guidance.
- d) If the complainant is uncomfortable directing the complaint to the most appropriate member at the local level, or wants to make a formal complaint, they can submit a complaint to the Chair of the AMEL Board (chair@riverschool.com.au)
- e) Where an anonymous complaint is lodged, the school will follow the complaints handling policy, when there is sufficient information to do so.

10.2. Acknowledgement, Assessment and Referral

- a) The staff member receiving the complaint will:
 - i. acknowledge the complaint within two (2) business days, outlining the next steps and where possible the estimated timeframes.
 - ii. assess the complaint, using the definitions of informal and formal complaints in this policy, and refer the complaint to the informal or formal complaints process.

10.3. Registration and Support

- a) The recipient of the complaint will promptly enter it onto the complaints register, regardless of whether it proceeds through the informal or formal process.
- b) The recipient of the complaint will offer support to the complainant as appropriate, which may include assistance with completing documentation or understanding procedures.
- c) If a student is a complainant, respondent or victim, or the child of a complainant, respondent or victim of a matter being managed through this policy, the school may offer the student support where appropriate e.g. discussing suitable adjustments with parents/caregivers.

10.4. Informal Complaints Handling Process

- a) The informal process is designed to resolve issues promptly and collaboratively at the local level.
- b) It may involve constructive discussion and negotiation between the complainant and the relevant staff member(s).
- c) If the complaint cannot be resolved informally, it will be escalated to the formal process.

10.5. Formal Complaints Handling Process

- a) The formal process begins with the assessment of the complaint by a designated staff member (e.g., a member of the senior leadership team or the board chair for complaints against the principal)
- b) The staff member may gather additional information through investigation, interviews, or evidence review

- c) The staff member will determine appropriate action, which may include:
 - iii. Mediation
 - iv. Disciplinary measures
 - v. Implementation of policy changes
 - vi. Referral to external agencies (e.g., police)
 - vii. Provision of written updates to the complainant throughout the process
 - viii. Other actions determined as appropriate in the circumstances.

10.6. Complaint Closure

- a) The complaint register will be updated with the date the complaint is closed and a brief summary of the outcome.
- b) The complainant will receive written notification of the outcome and any actions taken where appropriate.

10.7. Appeals Process

- a) Complainants may appeal the outcome of a complaint by writing to:
 - i. the principal (for complaints not previously managed by the principal)
 - ii. the board chair (for complaints previously managed by the principal).

Note: It is important to be aware that when making a complaint about a member of staff, in most instances, the staff member will be informed of the complaint as part of the process in addressing the concern.

At any time throughout the process of lodging a complaint or concern, the complainant will be given the option of having a support person present.

10.8. DISCUSSING YOUR COMPLAINT WITH A CLASSROOM TEACHER

If the complaint is with the child's teacher or relates to an issue concerning a child's experience at school, make a time to see the class teacher as soon as possible. Discuss the concern with the teacher and work together to come to a solution. The teacher will make a record of the concern and report on the meeting to the Principal.

10.9. DISCUSSING YOUR COMPLAINT WITH THE PRINCIPAL

If after approaching your child's teacher your complaint remains unresolved, make an appointment to see the Principal to discuss the issue further. Using a restorative approach, the Principal may facilitate a meeting between the class teacher and the complainant to seek a resolution.

If the complaint relates to more general school matters such as issues relating to school policy or school compliance, the complainant should approach the Principal directly. The Principal may refer the complaint to a delegate such as the Deputy, Business Manager or Chair of the Board, depending on the nature of the complaint.

10.10. LODGING YOUR COMPLAINT WITH THE SCHOOL BOARD

If you have discussed your complaint or concern with the Principal, and still feel that you have not reached a resolution, you have the right to contact the School Board. Complaints should be directed to the Chair of the Board and must:

- be lodged in writing
- clearly outline the nature of your complaint
- detail the steps you have taken to try and resolve the issue
- include your name, address, phone number and email address so the complaint can be followed up.

The School Board will work with the Principal and the complainant to reach a resolution. The Chair of the School Board can be contacted at chair@riverschool.com.au

11. RESOLUTION

A number of processes may be put in place to ensure that any complaints are resolved in a timely manner that is acceptable to all school community members involved.

The River School follows the principles of Restorative Practice and all processes and procedures regarding complaints align with the school's Neohumanist philosophy. When resolving disputes, we approach all complaints from a position of

compassion and understanding that all situations and concerns must be managed individually with love and respect for all parties.

Complainants may be satisfied a situation has been resolved by any of the following:

- knowing that changes have been made, and that matters will be different in future
- knowing that the school is now alert to a possible problem
- feeling that their concern has been considered seriously
- an outcome which may be different from the one they sought, but which they perceive to be well-considered
- a considered letter
- an apology.

12. CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality is an important issue for students, parents, volunteers and staff. It is essential that any complaint be treated in a confidential manner and with respect.

It should be made clear to all concerned that it is the school's policy that complaints made by parents should not rebound adversely on their children and similarly that complaints raised by students should not rebound on them or on other students.

The question of confidentiality should be discussed sensitively and on an individual basis with the complainant/s and the school's policy should be carefully explained.

Members of staff are rightly concerned that they should know about complaints that might be damaging to their reputation. Such complaints will be known only to themselves and to those who have to be consulted. The staff member, against whom the complaint has been made, can choose a colleague, who is not involved, to be their support person.

If there is a situation involving the police, the Principal, will take responsibility for action in the school and the Board Chairperson will be informed as soon as possible.

13. ANONYMOUS COMPLAINTS

Anonymous complaints may be where there is no indication of either name or address, or where the complainants say that they do not wish to be identified. They may come from members of the public, parents, students, volunteers and employees.

Complaints from the public about the behaviour of a group of students will be dealt with on a general basis, with reminders to all about the school's expectations. The school's Student Behaviour Management Policy and Bullying Prevention Policy will be consulted as required.

It may be possible to deal with a complaint without naming individuals. However, even if names are not given, the source of the complaint must be clear. Depending on the nature of the complaint and on the circumstances, it may be impractical to investigate without identifying the member of staff or the child – it may also be in the interest of the child or staff member to do so.

A complainant may request their name be withheld when making a complaint involving a staff member. In resolution discussions with the staff member concerned, the Principal may honour this request if the complainant name is not required to reach a satisfactory outcome.

Complainants should be encouraged to give their names and should be given reassurance on the issue of confidentiality. If they persist in wishing to remain anonymous, it is at the Principal's discretion as to what action, if any, should be taken, depending on the nature of the complaint.

Anonymous complaints will be recorded.

Anonymous allegations about child abuse will be handled in accordance with the school's Child Protection Policy.

14. INTRACTABLE COMPLAINTS

There may be a small minority of persistent or aggressive complainants who will never be satisfied, whatever the school does. The school may even discover on investigation that the complaint was without foundation or motivated by malice. Nevertheless, it is wise to treat all complaints seriously and to follow the procedures.

Most complaints can be resolved if approached positively. If a complaint becomes intractable, it may be due to its nature or to the way in which it was handled.

There are different stages of action to be taken with intractable complaints:

14.1. REFERRAL TO THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE SCHOOL BOARD

In most cases, the procedure will be that the Principal refers the matter to the Chairperson of the School Board and informs the complainant that this stage has been reached. However, a situation may arise where the complainant feels the Principal has mishandled their complaint. In these circumstances, the complainant can write directly to the Chairperson of the Board chair@riverschool.com.au

The Chairperson will discuss the matter fully with the Principal and be provided with relevant documentation. If a briefing is required from a member of staff, this will occur in the presence of the Principal.

The Chairperson will respond to the complaint notifying them that he/she is reviewing the matter, asking them if they wish to add anything further and providing a date by which they may expect a response.

The Chairperson may be able to offer a new approach to the matter, and this may satisfy the complainant. The Chairperson may offer a meeting if issues remain unresolved, with the aim to reach a positive conclusion.

If a positive solution is reached, the outcomes will be summarised and confirmed before the meeting disperses. The agreement will be recorded, copied and circulated as soon as possible.

Review

The School does not offer unlimited opportunities for review if a complainant is unhappy with the resolution of a complaint. Any appeal against the resolution of a complaint should be made in writing to the Board. An appeal is only likely to be considered if there is evidence that there was a procedural problem with the investigation.

15. THE ROLE OF OUR PARENTS AND FRIENDS ASSOCIATION (P&F)

Each class has a P&F representative. One of the roles of the P&F representative is to bring general parent concerns, questions and ideas that affect a whole class or the school to the Parent Committee meeting which is attended by the Principal or Deputy.

The P&F is not an avenue for individual complaints concerning students, staff or parents. The complainant should be referred to the *Complaints Handling Policy and Procedure* and advised to share their complaint with the appropriate party.

16. IMPLEMENTATION

The River School is committed to raising awareness of the process for resolving complaints at the school, including by the development and implementation of this policy and related procedures and via the clear support and promotion of the policy and procedures.

Staff are informed of this policy annually at their Professional Development Day and provided updates as they occur via staff meetings. The policy is available to parents and general public on the school website.

The River School is also committed to appropriately training relevant employees (especially senior staff) on how to resolve complaints in line with this policy and the related procedures.

The River School will keep appropriate records of complaints, will monitor complaints and their resolution and will report on a high-level basis to the school Board on complaint handling at the school.

The River School will act to encourage students, parents and employees to contribute to a healthy school culture where complaints are resolved with as little formality and disruption as possible.

APPENDIX

The River School Complaints Handling Procedure