



Disputes and Complaints Policy Parents and Staff Communication

Spirit of Play Community School is committed to open communication between our staff, School Council, and Parents. These Dispute and Complaints procedures are also outlined in our Parent Handbook so that all parents are aware of our policy. As a community, we are continually reassessing and developing our school, so all input is helpful.

- Spirit of Play Community School at all times promotes avenues of open and honest communication.
- This policy is based on the general ethos within the school of trust, and transparent decision-making. Parents are encouraged to participate in planning the school's procedures and policies.
- We place emphasis on procedures that regularly allow parents to air any grievances they may have before they become disputes.
- There is an expectation that when undertaking dispute resolution there is a clear emphasis on a positive outcome for all parties involved.

What constitutes a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem.
A complaint may be made if a parent thinks that the school has, for example:

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

A complaint may be made about the school as a whole, or about an individual member of staff.

PROCEDURE - FOR PARENTS

1. If you have a complaint, first consider what your complaint is really about:

a. Try to clarify what the issues are for you and identify what needs of yours would be addressed in an outcome you considered satisfactory.

b. Try to identify any strong emotions you have. Are these emotions in proportion to the problem? How can you manage them so they do not interfere with resolving the complaint in a positive way?

c. Talking it over with someone you trust can help you identify issues and needs and help you manage your emotions and gain perspective.

d. Thinking of some possible solutions can be of benefit, especially if you remain flexible about them, to allow for other people's needs you may be unaware of.

e. Consider who is the best person at school to approach with your complaint. The list below may help you. You may seek advice from a School Council member or approach any staff member you feel would be in a good position to help you resolve your complaint.

(1) Your child's teacher: matters related to the class program or environment or your child's progress or well being.

(2) Principal: matters related to the educational program of the school, your child's well being, student behaviour as a group or individually, bullying, volunteers, conduct of the school council or unresolved complaints with another member of staff.

(3) Admin assistant: matters related to administration, maintenance, buildings and grounds, initial guidance on school policies. In many cases you will be referred to the Principal or School Council but sometimes your



complaint may be able to be resolved without waiting for a School Council meeting or your complaint might warrant the calling of a special meeting.

(4) School Council: Projects involving a significant budget, governance issues including policies, and unresolved complaints with members of staff.

(5) Chair of the School Council: For a serious complaint about a member of staff, you are advised to approach the Chair of the School Council.

3. When you have clarified your complaint and are ready to approach someone at school:

a. You may approach this person with your complaint verbally or in writing. Both ways are valid and useful in different circumstances. If you prefer to present your complaint verbally, it may be of benefit to have some notes with you so you do not forget important points you wish to make. You may bring a person with you for support.

b. Be positive and straight forward. Approach the person as a partner in problem solving. Present the complaint as a problem you would like to resolve, rather than trying to work out who or what is right or wrong.

c. The person you approach will let you know what they think will happen next and a time frame for this. All efforts will be made to resolve problems as quickly as possible without rushing to less than satisfactory solutions. You will be kept up to date on progress.

4. Confidentiality

a. A confidential record will be kept of your complaint, to ensure it is resolved satisfactorily and followed up, to review the effectiveness of the resolution and this process. Complaints also provide the school with valuable information for improvement, some of which may only be seen clearly in the fullness of time.

b. In cooperation the teacher/s and office administration will monitor all complaints at the school

c. If your complaint is about a person, this person will be informed of the substance of your complaint.

d. Confidentiality will be respected and maintained so far as is possible.

5. Resolution

a. If you are satisfied with the resolution of your complaint, you can congratulate yourself on approaching the problem well and working as part of a team to come to a solution.

b. If you are unsatisfied with the outcome of your complaint:

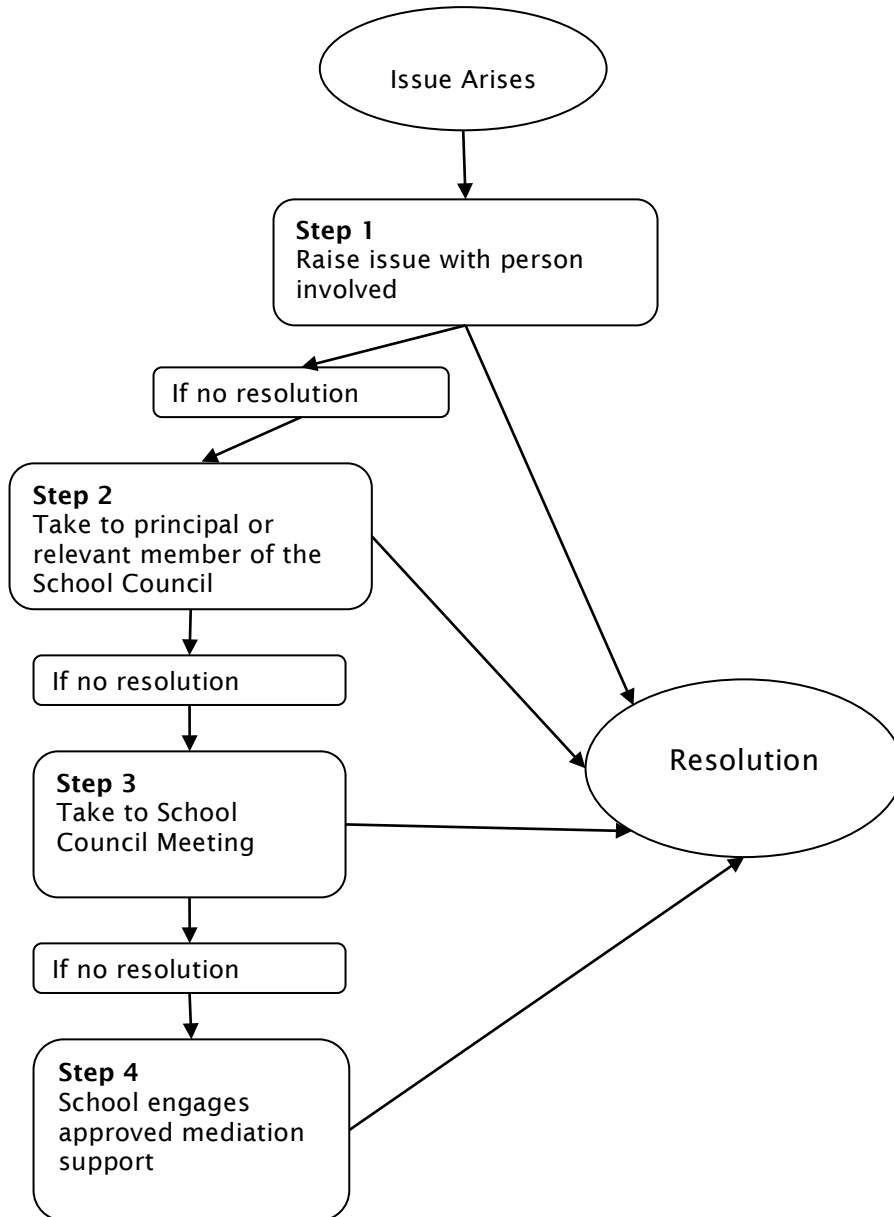
(1) Please approach someone else who has the authority to help you, usually the principal or a member of the school's School Council (please refer to the flowchart below). Alternatively, approach the same person in a different way or at another time.

(2) If you are still unsatisfied, you may present your complaint at a School Council meeting. You have the right to call a special whole school meeting under conditions detailed in the constitution.

(3) Further to this you may approach the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia to suggest an appropriate mediator or seek legal advice.



Figure 1. Dispute and Complaints Resolution Policy Process Flowchart





FOR STAFF AND SCHOOL COUNCIL MEMBERS

- Parents need to feel that their views matter.
- All complaints need to be handled seriously.
- Complaints against members of staff need particularly sensitive handling.
- All complaints **MUST** be recorded.

Recording of Complaints

All complaints should be recorded using a 'Record of Complaint' form and then this completed form will be kept in the 'Complaints' file in the cubby office filing cabinet. The 'Record of Complaint' form contains the following information:

- date when the issue was raised
- name of parent or person making the complaint
- name of pupil
- brief statement of issue
- member of staff handling the issue and
- brief statement of outcome.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is an imperative element. It is essential that any complaint is treated in a confidential manner, with confidentiality respected and maintained so far as is possible.

Resolution

Sometimes the very acknowledgement of an issue by the school will be sufficient. Satisfaction for a complainant may come from 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.

Training

Given the diverse nature of complaints, the school ensures that all staff and School Council members know how to carry out their responsibilities. Training covers:

- the complaints procedure
- communication skills, such as listening, questioning and calming
- handling complaints, negotiation and mediation skills
- skills in observing, recording and reporting
- the benefits of handling complaints well and the consequences of handling them badly.

The school also offers Non-Violent Communication Workshops to staff, school council members and parents.