

# SAC COMPLAINTS AND GRIEVANCES POLICY

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## 1. Policy statement

Sholem Aleichem College welcomes feedback from all members of the College community and takes all complaints or concerns that may be raised seriously. Sholem Aleichem College:

- Recognises the rights of its students, employees, parents and guardians to register a complaint or grievance about any decision, behaviour, act or omission that they feel is unfair, discriminatory or unjustified.
- Provides an environment of mutual trust and open communication where the expression of opinions is encouraged.
- Considers situations from all perspectives and responds in a manner that promotes an environment conducive to collaborative problem solving.
- Enables the resolution, where possible, of complaints to be of mutual satisfaction for those involved.
- Promotes fairness and equity in dealing with disputes, complaints and complainants.
- Ensures compliance with all legislative and statutory requirements.
- Assures the confidentiality, where practicable, of the information provided by any person involved with a complaint.

## 2. Statement of Commitment to Child Safety

Sholem Aleichem College is committed to ensuring a child safe environment exists throughout our College. The safety, wellbeing and rights of all children attending the College are paramount. Sholem Aleichem College's commitment to creating a safe environment for all students who attend the College is endorsed at the highest level by the College Council and the Principal. For more information please refer to our Child Protection Policy.

## 3. Background/ Sources

Sholem Aleichem College is committed to handling complaints effectively and efficiently. To manage complaints effectively, we have established a Complaints Handling Policy and Procedure in line with:

- Principle 6 of the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations, using the Office of Child Safety's "Complaints Handling Guide: Upholding the Rights of Children and Young People"
- the international complaints handling standard (ISO 10002:2018 Quality management – Customer satisfaction – Guidelines for complaints handling in organizations), and
- the Australian/New Zealand complaints handling standard (AS/NZS 10002:2014 Guidelines for complaint management in organisations)

Please note that complaints concerning the unacceptable behaviour of a specific child/ren may also be handled under the resolution procedures set out in the *Student Behaviour Management*

*Policy and Code of Conduct Policies* if deemed appropriate. All complaints, under any policy, need to be assessed as to whether they are a general or a notifiable complaint.

## **4. Aim**

This Complaints and Grievances Policy is designed to assist staff, students, volunteers and members of the community understand how to make a complaint. This policy will provide guidelines for:

- Receiving and dealing with complaints.
- Compliance with legislative requirements.
- Investigating complaints.
- Attempting to resolve the complaint to the mutual satisfaction of those involved in a respectful, professional and collaborative manner.

This policy does not apply to complaints alleging criminal or unlawful behaviour, which shall be referred to the appropriate authorities.

## **5. Scope**

This policy applies to all staff, students, volunteers, contractors, Council members and families or any member of the community who may come into contact with Sholem Aleichem College.

## **6. Related policies and documents**

**SAC Privacy Policy**

**SAC Diversity and Inclusion Policy**

**SAC Child Protection Policy and Code of Conduct**

**SAC Staff Code of Conduct**

**SAC Parent/ Guardian and Volunteer Code of Conduct**

**SAC Student Code of Conduct**

**SAC Student Behaviour Management Policy and Procedures**

**SAC Prevention and Response to Bullying**

**SAC Compliance and Risk Management Policy**

## **7. Definition**

### **What is a complaint?**

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction made to Sholem Aleichem College, related to our services or operations, or the complaints handling process itself, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected.

Complaints about child abuse, grooming or other harm, or other breaches of our Child Safe Codes of Conduct, relating to conduct by:

- current or former staff members
- current or former students
- other people on College premises or at College events are managed differently to other complaints

refer to our Child Protection Policy, section on Complaints About Child Safety Incidents or Concerns At or Involving the College or its Staff Members.

## **8. Key roles and responsibilities**

**The students/parents/guardians/staff are responsible for:**

- As soon as practicable communicating any concerns relating to the College:
  - In the first instance, preferably and in most instances, raising any concerns directly with the person/persons involved in order to resolve the concerns without recourse to the complaints procedure
  - Raising the concerns with a staff member
  - Raising any concerns with the Assistant Principal after discussion with staff member involved.
  - If resolution is still not achieved, then the complaint needs to be raised with the Principal.

**The staff are responsible for:**

- Where possible/practicable responding to and resolving issues as they arise
- As soon as practicable, referring unresolved issues to the Assistant Principal or Principal.
- Informing the Principal as soon as practicable if a complainant has been referred to them.
- Informing the Principal as soon as possible after a complaint is received, regardless of whether the staff member believes the complaint to be true or not.
- Recording and reporting major complaints to Principal as soon as practicable. Major complaints include but are not limited to situations impacting somebody's health and wellbeing or their ability to participate or perform in schooling or work

## 9. Policy Implementation

**Dealing with minor complaints from students:**

Children learn best in a caring, friendly and safe environment. At Sholem Aleichem College, the Peer Mediation Program assists with the development of positive relationships, conflict resolution and open communication between the whole school community.

It aims to enable students to advance their skills in communication, problem solving and conflict resolution, improve the social and learning environment while decreasing hostility, violence and anti- social behaviour.

If students have a minor complaint, they are encouraged to:

- Seek out the Student Peer Mediators, who wear orange vests to be visible to both students and teachers in the yard.
- Student Peer Mediators will act as neutral persons who lead the mediation process. They help the disputants to communicate and try to reach an agreement.
- Peer Mediation is a voluntary program. Not all playground conflicts will be resolved through Peer Mediation. More serious conflicts will be dealt with by the yard duty teacher.
- Teachers may direct minor matters to Peer Mediators.
- The School Captains will organise a timetable for the Student Peer Mediators including a regular meeting time to discuss problems, complete new rosters and plan goals for the future.
- The Student Peer Mediators will be encouraged to promote the Peer Mediation program via displays, school newsletter articles, reporting at assembly etc.
- Teachers should discuss Peer Mediation or Conflict Resolution in class.
- Teachers will receive Peer Mediation Agreement forms from the peer mediators at the end of recess and lunch. These identify students involved in disputes and discussions with Peer Mediators. If possible, teachers should have a short discussion with disputant letting them know how proud they are that the student(s) has/have tried to resolve conflict with the help of Peer Mediators.
- Teachers should keep a record of these Peer Mediation Agreement forms.

**Evaluation:**

- Direct observation by supervising teachers.
- Survey Student Peer Mediators.
- Survey the students.

### **Raising major and minor concerns or complaints from students/parents/guardians/staff:**

A complaint is any verbal or written grievance from parents/guardians, staff or person involved with the College. The nature of the complaint will determine the appropriate policy or mechanism to deal with it.

Complaints, including general and notifiable complaints that relate to the operation of the College, including the delivery of the program, would be dealt with under this complaints policy. A notifiable complaint is when it alleges a breach to the Act or Regulations, or that the health, safety and wellbeing of a child or member of staff may have been compromised.

It is good practice to keep a record of major and minor complaints received. These can be recorded and kept in a secure file. The entries should include details of information received and how the issue was resolved. This ongoing record can provide valuable information when reviewing work practices as common minor complaints can help identify ways we can better meet the needs of children and families.

In the first instance, a complaint should be made to the school by telephone, in person or in writing to:

- the student's class teacher or specialist teacher about learning issues and incidents that happened in their class or group
- the Assistant Principal about issues relating to staff members or complex student issues
- the Principal about issues relating to school policy, school management, staff members or very complex student issues.

### **Procedure for all complaints**

#### **Step 1: Receiving the complaint**

- Receiving the complaint and encouraging the complainant to submit their complaint in writing in order to make the terms or basis of any complaint as clear as possible.
- Complying with the *Privacy Policy* in regard to all meetings, discussions or negotiations in relation to a complaint.

#### **Step 2: Informal resolution of the complaint**

- Where appropriate, complainant is encouraged to first raise the matter directly with the relevant staff member. If the staff member has been unable to resolve a matter informally, or simply wishes to make a formal complaint they can do so by any of the following means:
  - Sending an email to the Principal at [principal@sholem.vic.edu.au](mailto:principal@sholem.vic.edu.au)
  - Sending an email to the HR Manager at [sachr@sholem.vic.edu.au](mailto:sachr@sholem.vic.edu.au)
  - A meeting will be held with the HR Manager and/or Principal in attempt to resolve the matter.

**If not resolved, the Assistant Principal or Principal will organise a meeting as soon as possible**

#### **Step 3: Assessment of the complaint**

#### **Meeting with the Principal or Assistant Principal – general and notifiable complaints**

- Meeting with the Principal to deal with the complaint as soon as possible.
- This meeting may include the School Psychologist or another staff member/advocate.
- Consideration of the nature and the details of the complaint.
- Identifying which policies (if any) the complaint involves.
- The Principal will inform the staff member if their involvement is required. For example, where a complaint involves an incident with a child and a staff member, it may require the involvement of other staff members. (refer also to Child Protection Policy for notifiable incidents)
- If required, invite the complainant to meet with the Principal to discuss the complaint and to provide additional information where relevant.
- If a meeting is not required, the Principal is to inform the complainant of the procedure for dealing with the complaint. Time, date and details of this conversation are to be recorded
- Maintaining appropriate records of the information and data collected. This includes minutes of meetings and copies of relevant documentation relating to the complaint. This is to be provided to the Assistant Principal if it relates to a student and the HR Manager if it relates to a staff member
- Respecting the confidential nature of information relating to the complaint. The Principal and anyone involved in the complaints process will handle any complaint in a discrete and professional manner. Personally identifiable information about a complainant will only be made available for the purpose of addressing the complaint and (unless the complainant consents) will be actively protected from disclosure.

#### **Step 4: Investigating the complaint and gathering relevant information**

- Meeting with individual witnesses to any alleged incident, giving right of reply to the person or persons against whom the allegations are made in relation to any accusation or information relating to an alleged incident.
- Reviewing relevant information and documents.
- Obtaining any other relevant information or documentation that will assist in trying to resolve the complaint.
- Seeking advice, where appropriate, from individuals and organisations that may be able to help resolve the complaint. (Any cost in seeking advice would require prior approval by the Principal)

#### **Step 5: Resolving the complaint**

- General complaints: Endeavouring to resolve the complaint by mutual agreement of the parties involved. Reporting outcomes and, where required, setting out the terms of any recommendations to be considered by the Principal. Confidentiality of complainants will be maintained and the *Privacy Policy* will be complied with.
- Referring the complaint to the Principal in the event that the complaint has not been resolved to the satisfaction of the parties involved, or particular decisions require Principal approval.

#### **Step 6: Further Involvement of the Principal**

- Providing a report to the Principal, including relevant information gained in investigations and consultations relating to the complaint.
- The Principal reviews the report and any recommendations and makes a decision on the action, if any, to be taken, including relevant review mechanisms.

#### **Step 7: Reporting back and follow-up**

- Advising the complainant and other relevant parties, of any decisions the Principal has made relating to the complaint. Where appropriate, the Principal will set in place relevant review mechanisms and/or procedures to monitor progress.
- Principal and staff to provide feedback and decisions in writing. If the response is accepted, the

complaint will be closed.

- Recording complaints (including minor complaints) and providing a report to the Principal, or vice versa, on the number and nature of any complaints received. Confidentiality will be maintained at all times.
- If the initial response is not acceptable the matter will be reviewed internally by the Principal or the Principal's delegate, who may seek additional information or submissions from the relevant parties.
- The Principal or their delegate seek to resolve all disputes within 14 days from the date that the review process is initiated. The matter will be closed if the response of the Principal, or their delegate, is accepted.

### **Step 8. External resolution alternatives**

- If the matter remains unresolved and/or the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome or the way the complaint has been managed, the complainant may pursue external resolution alternatives.
- External agencies to which complaints may be made include the Victorian Regulations and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) ([vrqa.vic.gov.au](http://vrqa.vic.gov.au)) and the Victorian Ombudsman ([ombudsman.vic.gov.au](http://ombudsman.vic.gov.au)). For general information on mediation, counselling, advocacy and support, refer to the Dispute Settlement Centre of Victoria ([disputes.vic.gov.au](http://disputes.vic.gov.au)).

### **Complaints about the Principal**

Grievances or Complaints involving the Principal will be brought to the attention of the College Council in email or letter form via the HR Manager at [sachr@sholem.vic.edu.au](mailto:sachr@sholem.vic.edu.au) or 11 Sinclair Street, Elsternwick VIC 3185.

### **Evaluation**

In order to assess whether the policy has achieved the values and purposes, the Principal will:

- Monitor complaints received, assess and evaluate any risks and whether a satisfactory resolution has been achieved.
- If appropriate, conduct a survey in relation to this policy or incorporate relevant questions within the general student/parents/guardians survey.
- Take into consideration feedback on the policy from students, staff, parents/guardians and the Principal.

## **10. Review date**

Policy reviewed and endorsed by Council June 2022

Next review June 2024 or earlier if necessary.