



COMPLAINTS HANDLING POLICY

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INTRODUCTION

Knox Grammar School values feedback (both positive and negative) from all members of the School community. The School is committed to improving our services and systems for the benefit of our students and their families and addressing any wrongs that may occur. If a concern is raised or a complaint is made it will be taken seriously

PURPOSE

This Complaints Handling Policy is intended to assist parents, students and others connected with the School to understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint and the process that may be followed afterwards and, in so doing, provide a means to identify and address issues raised, take relevant action and, in consequence, improve standards, reduce cause for further complaints and raise stakeholder satisfaction with the School.

APPLICATION AND SCOPE

This Policy and related procedures and guidelines apply to all concerns raised and complaints made (as defined) other than concerns raised and complaints made by staff members and matters involving unlawful or unethical conduct or serious misconduct reported to Deloitte under the School's confidential external reporting service.

Under this Policy, concerns may be raised, and complaints made, by individuals and organisations, including but not limited to:

- students, parents, guardians, grandparents, volunteers;
- other organisations and persons employed in such organisations; or
- any person in the general community who has concerns about a person or their behaviour or conduct in connection with the School.

DEFINITIONS

WHAT IS A COMPLAINT?

A *complaint* is an expression of dissatisfaction, here related to our services, personnel or operations, (including the actions or omissions of individual staff members) or the complaints handling process itself, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected.

WHAT IS A CONCERN?

A *concern* has its ordinary meaning and generally is 'lower level' than a complaint – here related to our services, personnel or operations, (including the actions or omissions of individual staff members) or the complaints handling process itself.

Concerns and complaints may be about an act, behaviour, course of conduct, omission, situation or decision. They may be about any aspect of the School's operations, service or personnel. Without limiting the preceding sentence, they may be about a:

- Child or young person or an adult;
- Staff member
- Volunteer or contractor
- group or organisation connected with the School;
- single incident or a series of incidents;
- seemingly minor issue or a very serious issue, such as harm to a child or young person;

- failure to comply with an applicable Code of Conduct or;
- failure to comply with a legal obligation

Complaints about and allegations of staff misconduct or reportable conduct are managed separately to other complaints. For more information, and for definitions of staff misconduct and reportable conduct, refer to the section at the end of this policy - *Complaints and Allegations of Staff Misconduct or Reportable Conduct*.

OUR POLICY

UNDERPINNING PRINCIPLES

Knox is committed to:

- Having an accessible pathway for people to raise concerns and make complaints.
- Treating a person raising a concern or making a complaint (hereafter collectively a complainant) respectfully.
- Good communication with complainants.
- Handling concerns raised and complaints received in a timely and fair manner and as effectively and efficiently as possible.
- Learning from feedback received and matters raised and seeking to improve our standards.

The School will seek to ensure that:

- Concerns raised and complaints made are addressed and resolved as openly and responsibly and in as timely, efficiently and effectively a manner as possible. The process and timeframes for resolution will vary depending on the nature, complexity and timing of the issue.
- Where a formal complaint is made:
 - the process followed is fair and impartial and as supportive of the parties involved as reasonably practicable.
 - An appropriate level of confidentiality is preserved. This will vary depending on the nature and substance of the complaint (see below).
 - Complainants are treated respectfully.
 - Good communication occurs with both complainants and any person(s) the subject of a complaint, including regarding the process and steps being followed, anticipated timeframes, the progress of the matter and the overall outcome of any investigation (being mindful of privacy considerations).
 - The complainant and any student on whose behalf the complaint is made are not subject to any victimisation, discrimination or retribution whilst at School.

Positive resolution of a complaint generally involves:

- Seeking resolution at the level at which the complaint is (or most appropriately should have been) made.
- Gathering and considering all relevant information.
- Taking into account the views of all parties.
- Considering the School's policies.
- Gaining agreement of all parties to an outcome.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The School is committed to maintaining the confidentiality of information throughout the informal and formal complaints process as far as is practicable and lawful. Generally, information will be restricted to those who genuinely need to know in order to deal with the concern or complaint. Some information about the specific complaint may need to be disclosed to others during the process of managing the complaint or arising out of its resolution.

The School will seek to ensure that personally identifiable information about a complainant is only be made available for the purpose of addressing the concern or complaint and (unless the complainant consents) is actively protected from disclosure.

INFORMAL COMPLAINTS RESOLUTION

The vast majority of issues causing concern in schools can be handled promptly and in an informal manner. Generally, concerns should first be raised directly with, or complaints made to, the relevant staff member or, if the issue concerns other students, the mentor team leader or, in the case of boarders, the Boarding Head of House. For example, often the classroom or subject teacher is the best person to handle concerns about matters within their classroom and/or area of responsibility, such as their programming, assessments or student behaviour management.

This should occur as close as possible to the time of the issue arising. Discussing the issue or concern immediately and face to face may clarify the situation and resolve any misunderstanding and/or allow remedial action to be taken before any lasting adverse impact occurs.

If it is not possible to resolve the issue informally at this level, the complainant should contact the relevant senior staff member. In the case of:

- academic matters, this is the Head of Department,
- co-curricular matters, the Director of co-curricular activities,
- student issues, the Head of the relevant Academy, or Deputy Head of a Prep,
- boarding issues, the Head of Boarding.

If the issue remains unresolved, then the person making the complaint should approach:

- the Head of the relevant Prep school, where the issue involves Knox Prep or Wahroonga Prep;
- the Deputy Headmaster, 7-12, Students, where the issue involves student welfare or behaviour in the Senior School; or
- the Deputy Headmaster, Student and Teacher Excellence, where the issue involves teaching and learning.

Some concerns or complaints may be about a particular staff member and it may not be appropriate to raise the concern or complaint directly with them. If this is the case, the concern or complaint should be raised first with that person's supervisor (for example Head of Department or area, or manager). In some cases these staff members may be in a position of conflict of interest if they were to manage the complaint and it may be necessary for the complaint to be passed on to an independent member of staff. Some complaints may need the involvement of a Head of Campus or one of the Deputy Headmasters or other executive staff member. As issues are clarified, a complaint may be referred to another suitable complaint handler.

Even if the issue is resolved informally, staff in leadership roles are required to monitor issues raised to enable the identification of any systemic issues arising, and take appropriate rectification action.

FORMAL COMPLAINTS

If it has not been possible to resolve a matter informally, or a formal complaint is preferred, concerns can be raised and/or complaints made formally, at any stage, by any of the following means:

1. Conveying the concern or complaint face to face in a meeting with the relevant, mentor team leader, or Head of a relevant Department, Campus, or, in the Senior School, Academy, or, in connection with boarding, Boarding House, based on the nature of the incident being reported.
2. Conveying the concern or complaint over the telephone to the relevant person in one of the above roles.
3. Sending an email to this person.
4. Writing a letter to the School addressed to this person.

If the concern or complaint involves a person in one of these roles, concerns can be raised and/or complaints made to one of the Deputy Headmasters, the Director of Staff Services and/or the Headmaster. If the concern or complaint involves one of the Deputy Headmasters, or the Director of Staff Services, concerns should be raised and/or complaints made to the Headmaster. If the concern or complaint involves the Headmaster the concern should be raised and/or complaint made to the Chairperson of the School Council.

INFORMATION THAT IDEALLY SHOULD BE PROVIDED

To assist the School consider a concern raised or look into/investigate a complaint made, ideally complainants should be prepared to report the following:

- WHO was involved:
 - The person(s) making the complaint.
 - The person(s) on whose behalf the complaint is made.
 - The person(s) the subject of the complaint.
 - Whether there were any witnesses and, if so, the names of any witnesses. if known.
 - Any known contact details for all of the above.
 - If a child or young person was involved, the child or young person's age and parent/guardian details.

- WHAT they observed or heard (or as the case may be was reported to them and when).
- WHEN the concerning incident, behaviour or conduct was observed/alleged to have occurred.
- WHERE the concerning incident, behaviour or conduct occurred/was said to have occurred.
- WHY they are concerned and the impact of the incident (i.e. injuries, others at risk of harm, pattern of behaviour or omission).
- WHAT NEXT - if known, what the complainant would like to happen next and the outcome the complainant is seeking.

OUR FORMAL COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCESS

Formal complaints will usually be managed in accordance with the following general process, underpinned by the concepts of procedural fairness.

Step 1 - Formal complaints will be screened by the person receiving the complaint to determine, firstly, if there are any risks that need to be addressed and, secondly, whether the complaint is most appropriately dealt with by them or another person. If necessary, measures to address risk will be implemented and/or the complaint will be referred to another more appropriate person.

Step 2 - Complaints received will be acknowledged, as soon as practicable. Clarification of the Complainant's concerns may be sought with a view to identifying what the complaint is about, the next steps to be taken and the outcome sought and characterising the complaint. Further information may be sought at that time or later.

Step 3 - The Complaint will be handled by an appropriate staff member (the Complaint Handler) who will investigate the issues raised, gathering information or evidence and conducting an assessment of the evidence before making a determination, following principles of procedural fairness.

Step 4 - Following the determination, if appropriate, the Complaint Handler will formulate a resolution and provide a response to the Complainant. The response may be provided in writing (by email or letter) or verbally (face to face or over the telephone) depending upon the nature of the issue involved and the form of the Complaint. The matter will be closed if this response is accepted.

Step 5 - If the initial response is not acceptable to the Complainant the matter may be reviewed internally by a more senior staff member, the Headmaster or the Headmaster's delegate, who may seek additional information or submissions from the relevant parties before responding further. The matter will be closed if the response of the more senior staff member, Headmaster, or their delegate as the case may be, is accepted.

Step 6 - Where appropriate, recommendations will be made and/or steps taken to address any underlying processes which the investigation of the complaint revealed may require improvement.

OVERSEAS STUDENTS

If an overseas student has a concern or complaint they should speak with the School's Head of Boarding for guidance regarding the most appropriate (internal) person to receive their complaint.

If an overseas student is not satisfied with the outcome of the School's internal complaints handling process, the student may lodge an external appeal through the Overseas Students Ombudsman (OSO) which investigates complaints about problems that overseas students or intending overseas students may have with private education and training in Australia. The services of the OSO are free. The contact details for OSO are as follows:

Email: ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au

Call: 1300 362 072 within Australia. Outside Australia call +61 2 6276 0111.

Enquiries: 9:00am to 5:00pm Monday to Friday, Australian Eastern Standard Time (Australian Eastern Daylight Time when daylight savings is in effect)

Postal: Commonwealth Ombudsman, GPO Box 442 Canberra ACT 2601.

Website: <http://www.oso.gov.au/>

Knox agrees to comply with the OSO's recommendations, in so far as it is reasonably able to do so, and, where practicable, will seek to ensure that any recommendations made are implemented within the term following receipt of the recommendations.

COMPLAINTS AND ALLEGATIONS OF STAFF MISCONDUCT OR REPORTABLE CONDUCT

Complaints and allegations of staff misconduct and/or reportable conduct are handled by the School in a different manner to other complaints. This is because the School has legal obligations to report certain staff conduct to external authorities. Staff misconduct is a broad term that could include breaches of professional boundaries, codes of conduct or prescribed standards of behaviour, whereas reportable conduct is a term defined in law as including:

- any sexual offence or sexual misconduct, committed against, with or in the presence of a child (including child pornography offences, sexual touching or an offence involving child abuse material) including grooming behaviours
- any assault, ill-treatment or neglect of a child
- any behaviour that causes psychological harm to a child (whether or not, in any case, with the consent of the child).

Complaints relating to alleged staff misconduct or reportable conduct should be made to the Head of Staff Services, or Deputy Headmaster, 7-12, students. For the Head of Staff Services this should be done by emailing howarthk@knox.nsw.edu.au or telephoning 9487 0484. For the Deputy Headmaster, 7-12, students, by emailing oreganp@knox.nsw.edu.au, or telephoning 9487 0122. If the Head of Staff Services is the subject of complaint, the School's Chief Financial Officer (email: fergusond@knox.nsw.edu.au, tel.: 9487 0110) should be notified. If the Deputy Headmaster 7-12 students is the subject of complaint, the Headmaster should be notified.

The Head of Staff Services, Deputy Headmaster 7-12 Students, Chief Financial Officer, or Headmaster, as the case may be, will provide impartial information about policies, processes and procedures to:

- any person with a concern arising from alleged misconduct or reportable conduct, or
- any person against whom there is an allegation of misconduct or reportable conduct.

Further information about Knox's complaints handling procedures, regarding allegations of staff misconduct or reportable conduct, is contained in our Procedures for Handling Allegations of Staff Misconduct and Reportable Conduct document available on our public website.

COMPLAINTS AND ALLEGATIONS OF SERIOUS MISCONDUCT

As noted above, Knox has commissioned Deloitte to provide an independent and confidential Report Service for parents, students, staff and other members of the Knox community to report any serious misconduct. This service provides an avenue outside of the School's day to day policies, which is accessible, confidential and independent. It is designed as a safety net to overcome any future failures of policy or procedures or by individuals. Generally internal reporting avenues/complaints processes should be exhausted before engaging this Knox Reporting Service.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- The Knox Report Service for Raising Serious Matters of Concern
- Procedures for Handling Allegations of Staff Misconduct and Reportable Conduct

CONTACTS

Document Owner: Risk and Compliance Manager

DOCUMENT INFORMATION AND CONTROL

This policy document will be reviewed every one (1) year from the date of issue.

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