



DISPUTES AND COMPLAINTS POLICY Families and Staff Communication

1. Policy Statement

Spirit of Play Community School is committed to open communication between our staff, School Council, and wider community. As a community, we are continually reassessing and developing our school, so all input is helpful.

2. Policy Framework

- **An open approach:** 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. Families are encouraged to provide feedback on the school's procedures and policies.
- **Responsiveness:** The school seeks to reduce the anxiety of any complainant by being open to the receipt of a concern or complaint, taking the matter seriously and dispelling uncertainty about how the matter will be handled, as well as providing clear information on how quickly the matter will be dealt with.
- **Confidentiality:** It is essential that every complaint is treated in a respectful and confidential manner. It is the school's policy that complaints made by parents will not rebound adversely on their children and similarly that complaints raised by students will not rebound on them or on other students.
- **Provision for anonymous complaints:** Although we would prefer to know the identity of a person making a complaint as it can help in investigation and resolution, anonymous complaints may be made at any time via the 'School Stream' app (access available to all families). Anonymous complaints will be noted and dealt with in accordance with the circumstances, available information and the action required.

3. Definitions

A *Concern* is the expression of a worry, something that has made a person troubled or anxious about an issue and is usually expressed to a class teacher or other staff member. Depending on the nature of the concern, it can often be resolved at this 'first level' in an informal manner.

A *Complaint* is an expression of protest, objection, dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem, accusation, or criticism and is usually dealt with in a formal manner. More commonly, but not exclusively, a complaint would be expected to be in the form of a written communication, a letter or email, addressed directly to the relevant staff member, the Principal or the Chair of the school's governing body.

A complaint may be made if a complainant thinks that the school or someone has, for example:

- done something wrong;
- failed to do something it/they should have done;
- acted unfairly or impolitely; or
- ignored their concern.
- A complaint may be made about the school as a whole, about a specific department in the school, about a particular school activity, about an individual member of staff or about one or more students.

4. Procedure to follow if you have a complaint:

Step 1: Clarify the issues:

- Try to clarify what the issues are for you and identify what needs of yours would be addressed in an outcome you considered satisfactory.
- 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?
- Talking it over with someone you trust can help you identify issues and needs and help you manage your emotions and gain perspective.
- 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.

Step 2: Identify the correct person to approach:

- *Your child's teacher:* for matters related to the class program or environment or your child's progress or well being.
- *The Principal:* for 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.
- *The administrative team:* for 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.

- *School Council*: For projects involving a significant budget, governance issues including policies, and unresolved complaints with members of staff; or complaints about a member of the School Council you are advised to correspond with the Council as a body.
- *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.

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

- 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.
- 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.
- 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

Step 4: Resolution

- 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.
- If you are unsatisfied with the outcome of your complaint:
 - ◆ 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.
 - ◆ 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.
 - ◆ Further to this you may approach the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia to suggest an appropriate mediator or seek legal advice.

5. Confidentiality

- 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.
- In cooperation the teacher/s and office administration will monitor all complaints at the school
- If your complaint is about a person, this person will be informed of the substance of your complaint.

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

6. COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE FLOWCHART:

