
COMPLAINTS AND GRIEVANCE POLICY

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Responsible Person: CEO

Approved By: SSA Board

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1. Introduction

Studio Schools of Australia Ltd (SSA) is committed to fostering a safe, supportive, and respectful learning environment. Open and constructive communication is encouraged to resolve concerns fairly and efficiently. This policy provides the framework to raise complaints and grievances appropriately so they may be addressed.

SSA's approach to complaints is guided by:

- Providing a safe and supportive learning environment.
- Building positive relationships between students, parents, and staff.
- Ensuring a fair and efficient resolution process.

Where a complaint remains unresolved, further resolution may be sought through SSA's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and, if necessary, the SSA Board.

2. Purpose

This policy establishes clear guidelines for handling complaints and grievances to ensure:

- Fair, effective, and efficient resolution of concerns.
- Transparency in how complaints can be raised and managed.
- An accessible and accountable process for all stakeholders, including students, parents, staff, volunteers and contractors.

3. Scope

This policy applies to:

- **Students and Parents:** All students and their families are encouraged to use this policy for raising any concerns.
- **Staff:** SSA employees may use this policy for complaints related to their work environment.
- **Broader Community:** Volunteers, contractors, community members, and others associated with SSA can raise concerns under this policy.
- **Third Parties:** Anonymous or external complaints (e.g., from regulatory bodies) will be addressed where sufficient detail is provided.

4. Key Definitions

Complaint: An expression of dissatisfaction with actions, decisions, or services.

Grievance: A perception that something is unfair, wrong, or inappropriate.

Complainant: Any student, Parent, staff member, contractor, volunteer or community member who formally raises a concern.

Parent: A 'parent' includes:

- Any person who has parental responsibility for 'major long-term issues' as defined in the Family Law Act 1975 (Commonwealth).
- Any person appointed as 'guardian' pursuant to the Children Youth and Families Act 2004 (WA).
- An informal carer with whom the child normally or regularly resides, and who has day-to-day care and control of the child.

Resolved: An outcome where the resolution is formally documented, communicated in writing, and signed-off by the relevant authority.

Review period: once a resolution is agreed and implemented, it is subject to a 20 day review period during which concerns may be revisited before the matter is deemed final.

Serious Complaint: Allegations involving safety, legal breaches, misconduct, or systemic issues (e.g., child abuse, discrimination, criminal activity).

Unresolved: a situation remains unresolved where, after following the prescribed process and within the allocated timeframe, no agreement on next steps or remedial action is achieved.

5. Guiding Principles

SSA's complaint-handling process is guided by the following principles:

- **Accessibility:** Information on how to make a complaint and how it will be handled is readily available and support is provided where needed.
- **Responsiveness:** Complaints are acknowledged promptly and handled efficiently.
- **Objectivity:** Complaints are addressed fairly and impartially.
- **Privacy Protection:** Personal information is protected and shared only as necessary.
- **Student Focus:** Complaint resolution prioritises student wellbeing.
- **Accountability:** SSA ensures transparency in decision-making and resolution processes.

6. Procedure

Making a Complaint:

Informal Resolution: Minor issues may be raised verbally with the relevant staff member.

Formal Complaint: If the issue is not resolved informally, submit a formal complaint in writing (in person or via email) to the School Principal.

Support Options: Complainants may seek the assistance of an advocate, mediator or interpreter.

Authority, Governance and Escalation Levels for Formal Complaints

School/Local Level:

The School Principal is responsible for addressing and resolving complaints fairly within 10 business days.

System Level:

Complaints are escalated to the SSA CEO if:

- the complaint concerns System staff or School Principal,
- complaints at a school remains unresolved after 10 business days, or
- the complaint involves serious misconduct (e.g., child safety, legal breaches)

Complaints involving the CEO, or unresolved systemic issues (20 business days) are referred to the Board Chair and, where necessary, the full SSA Board for further review and resolution.

Escalation for unresolved issues: Unresolved issues will be able to engage the formal escalation process one-time, further escalation beyond that point will only proceed should new material evidence or procedural errors emerge.

External Options:

If unsatisfied, complainants may contact relevant Regulatory Bodies e.g. TRBWA, Fair Work or the Department of Education.

Legal and Regulatory Reporting:

Complaints involving potential criminal offenses, child abuse, or other legal breaches will be reported to the appropriate authorities (e.g., police, regulatory bodies).

Expectation:

SSA expects all people raising concerns or complaints to:

- Do so promptly, as soon as possible after the issue occurs or the concern has been realised;
- Provide complete and factual information about the concern or complaint, preferably in writing or via email;
- Maintain and respect the privacy and confidentiality of all parties. Gossip will not be tolerated;
- Acknowledge that a common goal is to achieve an outcome acceptable to all parties;
- Act in good faith, and in a calm and courteous manner;
- Show respect and understanding of differing points of view and value difference, rather than judging and blaming;
- Recognise that all parties have rights and responsibilities which must be balanced.

SSA will not tolerate anyone approaching students or their families directly a school related complaint. In the interests of safety and respect for all within the school community, people

must bring follow the escalation process for formal complaints to ensure that an appropriate resolution can be achieved.

7. Initial Response to Complaints:

SSA will make all reasonable efforts to promptly respond and resolve complaints made.

Upon receipt of a complaint of formal complaint of a serious nature (those that require intervention or investigation), the school will document:

- Name and contact details of the person with a concern or complaint;
- The date the concern was expressed or complaint made;
- The form in which the concern or complaint was received (such as face-to-face, by telephone, in writing, by email);
- A brief description of the concern or complaint.

All formal complaints will be recorded in a central Complaints Register. The register will capture sufficient detail, including the nature of the complaint, the parties involved, actions taken, and the outcome, to enable analysis of complaint data over a reporting period. This analysis will be used to identify trends and inform continuous improvement of SSA's services and complaint handling processes.

SSA will then:

- Promptly acknowledge receipt of the concern or complaint either in writing or via email.
- Establish a clear timeline for investigating and responding to the complaint and commit to adhering to this timeline.
- Ensure the complainant has a copy of this Complaints & Grievance Policy

Upon receipt of a concern or complaint of a less serious nature (those anticipated not to require intervention or investigation) the school will:

- Acknowledge receipt of the concern or complaint verbally and commit to providing a prompt response to the complainant with possible resolutions.

8. Complaints Against Staff Members:

The nature of the complaint will determine who is the most appropriate person or body to manage a complainant's concerns.

Misconduct:

All complaints of alleged misconduct or serious misconduct by a teacher or staff member should be reported to the Principal of the school. Complaints about teachers can also be reported to the TRBWA, which is the regulator in relation to the registration and investigation of serious misconduct.

In some cases, certain actions which involve physical or emotional misconduct, such as unlawful assault or threats to the person, may constitute a criminal offence. These types of offences should be reported to and investigated by the police. Initial consultation with the

Principal of the school may help to determine the appropriate course of action in these circumstances.

Child Abuse (Including Sexual Offences):

There are legal obligations on all adults to report child abuse to police once a 'reasonable belief' is formed that a sexual offence has been committed against a child. Failure to disclose a sexual offence against a child is a criminal offence under Section 125A of the Children and Community Services Act 2004 (WA).

In addition, SSA staff members who are mandated reporters under the Children and Community Services Act 2004 (WA) (such as teachers, residential mentors, and student wellbeing staff) have a separate, legal obligation to report any belief formed in the course of their work that a child is being or has been abused. This mandatory reporting requirement is detailed in SSA's Child Protection and Mandatory Reporting Policies.

Complaints involving communication with children under 16 years by teachers, staff, or any other person to prepare or 'groom' a child for future sexual activity is a criminal offence and must be reported to the police. The offence of grooming applies to any person aged 18 years or over and does not apply to communication between people who are both under 18 years of age.

Complaints Against the Principal/CEO

In the case of complaints involving the Principal, the SSA CEO should be informed immediately. In the case of complaints involving the SSA CEO, the SSA Board Chair should be informed immediately.

9. Addressing Complaints:

If the nature of the complaint does not require external escalation, then SSA may determine either an informal or more formal approach to addressing complaints, and will generally, in the first instance, choose an informal approach as it may prevent the escalation of a minor dispute to a more serious complaint.

Informal Options:

The following informal options could be considered:

- Self-resolution – The parties themselves may resolve concerns in open discussion with the provision of relevant information or the clarification of issues. This option involves reflection and conversations respectful of each person's needs in the school.
- Supported self-resolution – The parties may be assisted to resolve a possible misunderstanding, miscommunication or lack of clarity about the issue in question by a support person such as the Principal, a member of the School Leadership Team, a colleague, or counsellor providing professional advice or support.

Formal Options:

In circumstances where no mutually acceptable resolution to the matter is reached through informal resolution, or in cases where the matter is considered to be serious, formal procedures can include:

- **Intervention and Adjudication** – The Principal/CEO may meet with the party, or parties separately or jointly. If this does not resolve the issue then the Principal makes a decision and notifies the parties of that decision.
- **Facilitated mediation** – The parties may be assisted by a facilitator who is trained in mediation to identify issues, explore options and consider alternatives to find a resolution. The facilitator may be an external mediator, the Principal, a member of the School Leadership Team or a counsellor.
- **Investigation** – A complaint about a person concerning an alleged serious breach of legislation, school policy or procedure (e.g. student bullying, student drug and alcohol issues) may require an investigation. This may also involve relevant members of the SSA Executive Team. Investigations will be conducted in line with SSA's Performance and Conduct Policy.

10. Complaint Escalation:

If a matter cannot be resolved at the school level through formal or informal options, or if the complaint is about the Principal of the school, the complainant may be referred to the SSA System to be dealt with in accordance with their complaints policy.

11. Complaint Resolution:

Where a concern or complaint is substantiated in whole or part and a resolution has been agreed upon, the organisation will offer an appropriate response. This may include, but not be limited the following:

- An explanation or further information about the issue;
- Mediation, counselling or other support;
- An apology, expression of regret or admission of fault;
- To change its decision;
- To change its policies, procedures or practices.

12. Background Papers/ References

- a) Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (WA)
- b) Student Code of Conduct Policy
- c) Children and Community Services Act 2004 (WA)
- d) Family Law Act 1975 (Commonwealth).
- e) Children Youth and Families Act 2004 (WA).
- f) SSA Child Protection and Mandatory Reporting Policies
- g) SSA Performance and Conduct Policy