



# **Complaints Handling Policy**

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## COMPLAINTS HANDLING POLICY

This policy sets out the requirements with respect to management of complaints, as well as the various supports available to school/organisation staff when responding to concerns and complaints.

***The Complaints Handling Policy is intended for all people who might need to access a complaint process, including parents, carers, students, school and WEP Australia staff, host families and affiliated organisations.***

***The Complaints Handling Policy does not prevent an exchange student, parents, carers, school and WEP Australia staff, host families and affiliated organisations from exercising their rights to other legal remedies.***

NB: Schools enrolling student exchange students are required to maintain an overseas student's enrolment (to comply with student visa conditions) and appropriate student welfare support arrangements until the relevant complaints or appeals process is resolved.

### Context

This Complaint Handling Policy which outlines the policy and procedures relating to the management of complaints. The policy:

- ensures procedural fairness (in accordance with good practice and the minimum standards for VRQA registration)
- includes information on how to refer a complaint to the appropriate person/body if the complainant is not satisfied that their complaint has been resolved or addressed
- is accessible to all parties involved in the Student Exchange Program (in accordance with good practice and the minimum standards for VRQA registration).

### Scope

The scope of the Complaints Handling Policy covers all matters of complaint as they relate to the implementation of WEP's policies, guidelines, programs and processes, including complaints about child abuse and child harm, breaches of relevant policies or the Code of Conduct and obligations to act and report.

### WEP Australia's role

WEP, affiliated organisations and schools may receive and need to manage complaints on a range of matters. Complaints are best addressed in an environment where all the relevant parties feel able to raise issues concerning the welfare of students.

There is a requirement that all concerns are treated seriously and that opportunities raised through complaints to change or improve practices and learning opportunities for students are considered by WEP.



Ultimately the CEO of WEP, the local coordinator and/or principal is responsible for the efficient and effective organisation, management and administration of the school's complaint-handling processes.

They are required to:

- always consider their duty of care to the student or students involved in the complaint
- ensure staff are advised about the complaint where appropriate
- develop and publish a complaints policy which explains the processes for raising concerns or complaints including:
  - who to contact to raise a concern or complaint
  - actions upon receipt of a complaint
  - timeframes for acknowledgement and resolution of a complaint
  - potential outcomes
  - escalation process if mutually agreed resolution is not reached
- keep written records of complaints that require resolution actions and document all steps taken to achieve agreement
- train all staff on the complaint-handling procedures and provide professional development opportunities on complaint management.

The responsibility of WEP, affiliated organisations and schools is to work with the complainant (and student if appropriate) to achieve a mutually agreed resolution when a complaint is raised, by:

- acknowledging receipt of a complaint (verbal or written) within two days
- speaking with the complainant to ensure they are aware of the complaint policy, and to better understand the issues or problem. If the complainant has not raised the issue with the relevant staff member, the complainant may be asked to initiate discussions with the staff member in the first instance, if appropriate in the circumstances.

Where the complaint cannot be, or isn't appropriate to be, resolved with the relevant staff member, WEP, the local coordinator and/or principal:

- provides a prompt response with indicative timelines relevant to the nature of the complaint
- speaks with the complainant to ensure they understand the problem and provides any additional support to help resolve the complaint
- acknowledges the goal is to endeavour to achieve an outcome that supports the best interests and wellbeing of the student and that is, where possible, acceptable to all parties
- advises the complainant how the complaint will be addressed
- provides updates throughout the process as agreed with the complainant
- seeks advice from appropriate units within the department and/or external agencies
- considers the wellbeing of students, staff members and all other relevant parties
- in situations where further time is required, will consult with the complainant and discuss any interim solutions.



Where appropriate WEP, the local coordinator and/or principal:

- may arrange a meeting with the complainant, staff and/or all other relevant parties
- discusses the any findings with the complainant in an attempt to reach an agreed resolution
- communicates to the complainant steps they have taken or intend to take to prevent a similar incident or issue from occurring again.

## **Support person**

A complainant can have a support person to assist at any time in the complaint process.

A support person's role may include:

- discussing difficulties the complainant is experiencing in relation to the complaint
- helping to develop a good working relationship between the student, family, the school and/or any other relevant parties
- assisting the complainant to understand official policy and guidelines and the resolution being proposed for the complaint.

A support person can be a family member, a friend, a community member or a person provided through a support or advocacy agency.

A complainant must advise WEP, the local coordinator and/or the principal that they want to include a support person, advocate or another representative when making a complaint, and provide the name, contact details and relationship to the complainant of the nominated person.

Similarly, WEP, the local coordinator and/or the principal must inform the complainant when they intend to involve other people including staff to assist with the complaint process.

Failure to notify of the inclusion of third parties can result in the rescheduling or cancellation of the meeting.

## **Interpreting services**

Where applicable, WEP, affiliated organisations and/or schools and complainants should engage the local Translating and Interpreting Service as required.

## **Complaint management conduct**

When addressing a complaint, all parties are expected to:

- be considerate of each other's views and respect each other's role
- be resolution focused
- act in good faith and cooperation
- behave with respect and courtesy
- respect the privacy and confidentiality of those involved, as appropriate
- operate within and seek reasonable resolutions that comply with any applicable legislation and department policy.



There are a number of supports available to manage difficult, vexatious or malicious complaints. In these circumstances, WEP, affiliated organisations and/or schools should engage with independent third-party mediation and conflict resolution services, as appropriate.

## Outcomes of raising a complaint with the school

Outcomes are any actions consistent with WEP, affiliated organisations and/or school values, policies and relevant government legislation that are intended to support the student, family, school and/or other relevant parties.

Complainants must be provided with an explanation as to the steps taken to resolve the matters raised.

When all reasonable avenues have been exhausted and a mutually agreed resolution cannot be reached, the complainant may contact independent third-party mediation or a conflict resolution service to assist with resolution.

WEP, affiliated organisations and/or the school can engage a mediator or other conflict resolution service where appropriate.

NB: If a mutually agreed resolution cannot be reached, the complaint can be escalated to the CEO and/or Board of Directors of WEP or any affiliated organisations, and in the case of a school, to the local regional office for resolution.

## Raising a complaint with the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA)

Where a formal complaint made directly to WEP has not led to a satisfactory solution, and/or due process has not been followed in accordance with WEP's Complaints Handling Policy, the complainant has the right to raise a complaint with the VRQA.

The VRQA, in turn, will investigate complaints about the compliance of WEP with standards. Contact details for the VRQA are:

+61 3 9637 2806

<https://www2.vrqa.vic.gov.au/make-complaint>

## Policy Review

This policy will be **reviewed every year** and following significant incidents if they occur. WEP will record, review and analyse complaints, issues, concerns and safety incidents for the purpose of identifying causes and systemic failures, and to inform continuous improvement. WEP's **Evaluation Framework: Policies, Guidelines and Programs** outlines the process by which it will do this.

In accordance with the processes outlined in its **Engagement Overview**, WEP will share findings and actions taken in response to relevant reviews of its policies, guidelines and programs, including those related to child safety incidents, with students, families/guardians, staff and volunteers.



### Approval

Responsible Officer	Compliance Officer, WEP
Approval Body	CEO, WEP
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