

SUNEDEN SPECIALIST SCHOOL
PARENT CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS POLICY



Suneden is committed to providing a clear and responsive complaints process in order to assist parents and/or students to make a complaint when they are dissatisfied with the quality of educational services provided by the school. Concerns and complaints from parents or students will be resolved following the guidelines as outlined in this policy.

This policy does not apply to matters where there are legislated requirements such as Child Protection Responsibilities.

The concern may be about:

- the type, level or quality of services
- the behaviour and decisions of staff or a member of the Suneden community
- a policy, procedure or practice

A complaint may be made by a parent or student in good faith and with supporting information if they believe that the school:

- has done something wrong
- has failed to do something it should have
- has acted unfairly or inappropriately

Guiding Principles

- Suneden values the health, safety and wellbeing of all members of the school community.
- Suneden actively promotes the development of positive and respectful relationships and seeks to minimise the incidence of conflict that may result in a complaint.
- Suneden values feedback from parents and students, and therefore all concerns and complaints are received in a positive manner.
- Suneden is committed to complying with all relevant statutory and legal requirements.
- Parents expressing a concern or making a complaint have the right to be treated with respect, courtesy, and consideration.
- Parents making a complaint have the right to have their complaints listened to, taken seriously, and resolved fairly, reasonably and promptly.
- Parents should have access to appropriate and easily understandable information regarding the complaints process. The Parent Concerns and Complaints Policy will therefore be available on the school website to help clarify the process for parents.

- Concerns or complaints received by parents will be fully and objectively evaluated based on the facts or evidence provided in support of that concern or complaint.
- Complainants will not be victimised or suffer negative treatment because they have made a complaint.
- Concerns and complaints will be resolved at the school level wherever possible.

Making a Complaint

1. Parents are encouraged to discuss their concerns in an informal manner as soon as practicable after a matter becomes of concern with a view to resolution. Parents should discuss their concerns with their child's teacher first and foremost. Many concerns may be due to a misunderstanding and/or issues relating to communication. In the majority of cases, these can be satisfactorily resolved informally and quickly with a conversation. It is important to maintain positive relationships between parents and staff.
2. If the concern cannot be informally resolved in this way, or if the concern is of a more serious nature, parents are able to make an appointment to discuss the issue with the Principal. The Principal may be able to offer an immediate/ prompt resolution or be able to make recommendations.
3. If this initial meeting with the Principal does not resolve the concern, then a Mediation meeting will be organised. This meeting will include the parent with the concern, the staff member(s) involved, the Principal and any support people for either the parent or the staff member. All attendees at the meeting are expected to treat one another with respect and courtesy.

A Mediation meeting gives all parties the opportunity to:

- Consider the other person's point of view
 - Provide complete and factual information about their concern or complaint
 - Clarify events from all perspectives
 - Be listened to
 - Understand the position of the other parties and be considerate of this
 - Ask for assistance or further information as needed
 - Recognise that this is an opportunity to change situations into the future
4. If the concern is about the Principal, and parents feel that the matter cannot be otherwise resolved, then parents may choose to put their complaint in writing to the Chairperson, Suneden Specialist School Board of Management.

A parent may withdraw a complaint at any stage of the resolution process. If a complaint is withdrawn, the matter will be deemed to be closed, unless the school wishes to continue to address the matter raised.

As an Independent school, neither the Minister for Education nor the Department for Education has any power to directly intervene in any complaints relating to the operations of Suneden.

The Association of Independent School of South Australia (AISSA) will not act as a mediator between parents and schools but may be able to provide general assistance to help parents understand the School's position if a matter remains unresolved.

Record Keeping

Accurate records of all formal concerns or complaints will be kept at the school by the Principal.

The record should include the following details:

- Date when issue was first raised
- Identity of all person(s) involved
- Name of staff member(s) handling complaint
- Detailed statement of concern/complaint
- Date and time of allegation
- The way the complaint was communicated to the school (i.e. verbally, over the phone, email, letter etc)
- The requested solution for the complaint
- Statement of outcomes / procedures applied
- Time frame for reporting on the outcomes of any investigation
- Recommendations for improvements to school policy, procedures or practices that would resolve the parent's concern and prevent a reoccurrence of similar complaints
- Location of files established as part of office records management

The record should contain clear and accurate notes of conversations with parents, students and staff as documents created during the course of an investigation may need to be produced if the matter is investigated by an external body.

In instances when the concern is easily resolved over the phone or by front line staff then recording of the issue may not be required. Staff may however wish to make a note of these issues and the resolution in order to identify common or reoccurring issues requiring attention.

Possible Outcomes

All parties involved should participate fully in the resolution process to achieve an outcome which is reasonable and realistic.

Depending on the nature of the concern, there are a range of outcomes which may be considered to resolve the issue. These include:

- Providing explanations and reasons
- Reaching a compromise solution
- Giving an apology
- Providing a service not previously provided
- Dismissing the concern or complaint if it is in line with workplace policy or government policy
- Reviewing the class program
- Policy development, change or review
- Expert assistance/ Referral to external agencies
- Staff development, training or performance improvement
- Other action to ensure the matter is handled appropriately in the future

Each concern is dealt with on its particular circumstances and merits and any decisions reached through the resolution process do not necessarily set a precedent for any future concerns.

Where an issue has been resolved by the school, however the complainant remains dissatisfied, and continues to seek redress, the Principal may:

- Discuss the matter with the Board and identify additional strategies to resolve the issue
- Advise that no further discussion will be held on the particular issue
- Seek the involvement of an external mediator
- Seek advice from AISSA
- Seek legal advice

Privacy

It may not always be possible for Suneden to deal with a concern as effectively where a parent wishes to remain anonymous as this may limit the options for proper and thorough investigation and resolution. Parents, however will be assured that the fact of expressing a concern will not result in adverse treatment of either themselves or of their child.

Suneden will endeavour to ensure all parent concerns are handled with appropriate discretion and sensitivity, however the school reserves the right to disclose details of a complaint to other persons in order to facilitate the resolution of that complaint.

This may include:

- People dealing with the complaint
- People advising how the complaint should be handled
- People providing information such as supporting statements

Statements provided by those who have witnessed an event and the identity of that person, cannot always be guaranteed to be kept confidential as they may need to be disclosed if the matter is taken further.

Time frame

Suneden will aim to resolve all concerns and complaints in an efficient and timely manner. It is important to understand that the time taken to review a complaint will depend on the complexity of the issue, the need for further enquiries, and the number of people involved.

If the concern or complaint requires a longer amount of time to be resolved, then parties will be kept up to date with the progress.

Staff Training and Support

The Principal and other key personnel who are responsible for handling concerns and complaints will have access to training in this area. This includes training on active listening, negotiation and mediation.

Staff who have had a complaint made against them may be directed to the Access Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for counselling and support.