



GREAT
SOUTHERN
GRAMMAR

PARENT AND STUDENT COMPLAINTS POLICY



EMBARK ON A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY

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1 PURPOSE

In order to meet the guidelines of best practice, Great Southern Grammar has developed a complaints policy to help address and resolve potential problems, with a focus on relationships building, fair and timely resolution of the complaint, pre-empting and improvement.

At GSG, complaints are treated seriously and are used to improve standards and prevent cause for further complaint. Even unjustified complaints are viewed as possible indicators of areas requiring improvement.

Great Southern Grammar fosters an open culture in which:

- Parents and students are listened to;
- Students feel comfortable in contacting any member of staff;
- Parents feel comfortable in contacting the Principal, Heads of House, Head of Year, Homeroom Teachers, Head of Boarding or any staff member; and
- Staff members are comfortable in dealing with complaints.

All complaints will be acknowledged within a maximum of 48 hours and responded to in a timely manner. Complainants will receive regular progress reports during complex or lengthy investigations.

Staff will be aware of, and have access to, the school's Complaint Policy and Procedures on the MyGSG portal. New staff will receive an overview of the Complaint Policy and process during induction.

Complaints will be referred to the Principal or the Chair of School Council when appropriate.

The Principal may determine that the school will not pursue vexatious, trivial or previously finalised issues after a complaint has been considered.

2 SCOPE

This policy, as amended from time to time, applies to all students, parents, members of the public and volunteers of Great Southern Grammar School Incorporated (GSG), hereafter referred to as stakeholders. This policy will be reviewed annually and presented to the Principal and the School Council for ratification.

3 DEFINITIONS

Executive	The Principal, Deputy Principal, Director of Teaching and Learning or Heads of Subschool.
Complainant	A person who has a complaint.
Concern	An opinion, comment or expression of a concern (because of its importance and effect) which is raised informally in order to improve or change a situation. A concern can generally be addressed at the time of being raised without the need for more involved consideration.

Complaint	An expression of dissatisfaction with any aspect of education or related to a particular staff, part of the school, a policy or decision. Any person may lodge a complaint, a complaint must contain sufficient detail to enable it to be addressed and recorded.
Dispute	An unresolved complaint.
Resolution	An outcome of a complaint that has followed policy process and natural justice.
Natural Justice	<p>The principles of natural justice will apply to all decisions made under this policy and procedures document. As the consequences of any decision for any individual become more severe, so the importance of demonstrably acting fairly increases. The fundamental principles of natural justice are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The right to procedural fairness • The right to be given a fair hearing and the opportunity to present one's case; • The right to have a decision made by an unbiased decision-maker; and • The right to have that decision based on logically probative evidence.

4 ACRONYMS

AISWA	Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia
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5 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Principal

The Principal has overall responsibility for ensuring compliance with this policy and maintaining confidentiality.

Executive

The Executive members have responsibility for ensuring compliance with this policy and maintaining confidentiality.

Staff

All Staff have responsibility for ensuring compliance with this policy and maintaining confidentiality.

Chair of Council

The Chair of Council will have responsibility for ensuring compliance with this policy, maintaining confidentiality and resolving any dispute. The Chair may appoint a nominee to fill the role of the Chair.

6 POLICY STATEMENT

The principles of natural justice will be applied to all concerns or complaints. The staff charged with managing the concern or complaint will demonstrate fair and consistent decision-making.

Complaints will be handled promptly, confidentially and in accordance with procedural fairness.

Persons who are the subject of a complaint, who make a complaint or provide information in the course of an investigation into a complaint shall not be subject to prejudice, intimidation, and harassment or be subject to any detriment because of their involvement.

Where disciplinary processes are commenced against an employee as a consequence of a complaint being received complainants will be informed whether the allegation was substantiated or not substantiated. Complainants are not informed of the nature of any disciplinary action taken against an employee in respect to disciplinary matters due to confidentiality requirements.

Appropriate confidentiality is to be observed in any discussion of complaints. This means that these matters are to remain confidential between the employee and his or her line manager and any other parties who have a legitimate interest in the process

6.1 What Constitutes a Complaint

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem and must contain sufficient detail to enable it to be addressed and recorded.

A complaint may be made by if a person thinks that the School has, for example:

- done something wrong;
- failed to do something it should have done; or
- acted unfairly or impolitely.

A complaint may be made about:

- the School as a whole;
- a particular process, procedure or decision within the School; or
- an individual member of staff or department.

A complaint from a student may be made about:

- any person, within or outside the school; or
- any issue that may be affecting the student.

While parents will often raise issues on behalf of their children, there are issues which students may choose to raise on their own behalf and which are best raised by the students themselves (Refer to 6.4).

Complaints from members of the public will be treated in a similar way to complaints from parents, although most complaints from the public will normally be referred directly to the Principal or the Deputy Principal.

Complaints from members of staff about aspects of their work are covered in the *Staff Complaints and Grievance Policy*.

The key principles for the handling of complaints at Great Southern Grammar are:

- The School is open to the concerns of parents and students;
- Complaints are received in a positive manner;
- Parents and students can expect to be taken seriously and can approach any member of staff about their concerns;
- Information about complaints contains sufficient detail and is clear and readily available;
- Concerns are dealt with speedily and those who have raised them are kept informed about progress;
- It is not acceptable for students to receive adverse treatment because they or their parents have raised a complaint;
- Clear confidential files and a log are kept;
- Confidentiality is respected and maintained as far as possible;
- Resolution of the matter is sought;
- An independent arbiter can be engaged as a final level in the process.

6.1.1 Recording

The School maintains an accurate record of complaints and other concerns. This is required as:

- the complaint may become the cause of future legal action;
- patterns in the record of complaints may indicate a need for action; and
- the Principal will check the log regularly for trends and report on complaints to the School Council.

The log is maintained by the Personal Assistant to the Principal and contains the following:

- date when the issue was raised;
- name of parent;
- name of student;
- brief statement of the issue;
- location of detailed file;
- member of staff handling the issue; and
- brief statement of the outcome.

Confidential files on all complaints are to be maintained and cross-referenced with other files as necessary. The files contain simple but clear notes of all conversations with parents about any source of dissatisfaction. (This includes chats and telephone calls, as misunderstandings easily arise). Records concerning students are kept for seven years after the student reaches 18 years of age.

6.1.2 Confidentiality

Confidentiality is an important issue for students, parents and staff. It is essential that any complaint is treated with respect and in a confidential manner.

The question of confidentiality will be discussed sensitively and on an individual basis with the parents and the School's policy is to be carefully explained.

It may be possible to deal with a problem without naming individuals. However, even if no names are given, the source of the complaint may be unclear. Depending on the nature of the complaint and the circumstances, it may be impractical to investigate without identifying the member of staff or the child.

Members of staff have the right to know about complaints that might be damaging to their reputation. Such complaints will be made known to them and those who need to be consulted.

We cannot entirely rule out the need to make third parties outside the School aware of the complaint and possibly identify those involved. This would only be likely to happen where, for example, a child's safety was at risk or it became necessary to refer the matter to the police.

While information relating to specific complaints will be kept confidentially on file, we would point out that anonymous complaints may not be pursued.

Action which is taken under staff disciplinary procedures as a result of a complaint will be handled confidentially within the school by the Deputy Principal or Principal.

The school is aware there is a need to provide support for staff against whom a complaint is made. This would normally be provided by a colleague who is not otherwise involved.

6.2 Concerns and Complaints by Parents and Members of the Public

The school takes all concerns and complaints seriously. It is recognised that a gentle expression of concern, or a simple query, may grow into a major issue if parents feel that they have not been taken seriously or have been brushed aside. Often an issue that has the potential to become problematic can diminish if it is handled well in the initial stages. Therefore, the school's complaints management procedures are flexible and are used for both concerns and complaints raised.

6.2.1 Lines of Approach

Concerns and complaints may be made to any member of staff, but parents are encouraged to raise issues regarding their children in line with the School's Pastoral Care Policy. The initial points of contact recommended are:

- Junior School – contact the child's class teacher
- Middle School – contact the child's Head of Year
- Senior School – contact the child's Head of House

If staff are approached about a matter that lies outside their area of responsibility, the staff member will refer the matter to the appropriate person. The person who made the concern or complaint is to be informed when a matter is referred.

In all instances an appropriate member of Executive is to be informed of any parental complaints. This staff member will ensure that the matter is brought to the attention of the Principal or Deputy Principal.

Matters incapable of resolution at a particular level should be referred to the appropriate member of Executive, with parents kept informed of the action being taken. The member of Executive will refer those issues that need to go directly to the Principal.

There may be some parents who wish to go directly to the Principal with their concern or complaint, and this should be complied with. However, it should be explained that the Principal may be delayed in responding to the issue. It is preferable that concerns or complaints are referred to the Head of Subschool in the first instance, then the Deputy Principal and, finally, (if necessary) the Principal.

If the concern or complaint relates directly to a member of the Executive, excluding the Principal, parents should make an appointment with the Principal to discuss the matter.

If there is a situation involving the Police, the Principal, or his delegate (if the Principal is unavailable), must take responsibility for action in the school and ensure that the Chair of the School Council is informed as soon as possible.

Parents and members of the public can access the school's website or MyGSG and complete a Complaints, Compliments and Feedback form.

6.2.2 Resolution

Sometimes the very acknowledgment of an issue by the School brings relief to parents. Satisfaction in regard to a complaint may come from any of the following:

- knowing that changes have been made and matters will be different in the future;
- knowing that the School is now alert to a possible problem;
- feeling that their concern has been considered seriously;
- an outcome which may be different from the one they sought, but which they perceive to be well-considered;
- a considered letter; or
- an apology if appropriate.

If time has been needed to consider matters, parents will receive a report. This should cover:

- the issues raised;
- how the issues were considered;
- the people consulted;
- the action that is to be taken; and
- an apology, if appropriate.

6.2.3 Dispute

If a satisfactory outcome cannot be reached the complaint will become a dispute, the Principal will refer the matter to the Chair of the School Council and inform the parents that this stage has been reached. Where a parent believes that the complaint has been mishandled by the Principal, the parent may write directly to the Chair of Council.

If the complaint relates to the actions of the Principal, the complaint should be taken to the Chair of Council. The Chair will discuss the matter fully with the Principal and be provided with the relevant documentation. If a briefing is required from a member of staff, this will occur in the presence of the Principal.

The Chair will respond to the parents, notifying them that he/she is reviewing the matter, asking if they wish to add anything further and providing a date by which they may expect a response.

The Chair may be able to offer a new approach to the matter, and this may satisfy the parents. The Chair's response should be clear and detailed, and may offer a meeting with the parents. The Chair will consider seeking the advice of an independent arbitrator. Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (AISWA) will be asked for guidance and advice. If appropriate, for example if there is a conflict of interest, then AISWA will broker an independent arbiter.

6.2.4 Intractable Complaints

There may be a small minority of complainants who will never be satisfied. Nevertheless, all complaints will be treated seriously and the school's procedures followed.

6.3 Anonymous Complaints

Anonymous complaints are when there is no indication of either name or address, or where the complainants do not wish to be identified. Complaints may come from members of the public, parents or from students.

Complaints from the public about the behaviour of a group of students will normally be dealt with on a general basis, with reminders to all students about school expectations.

Parents and students are encouraged to give their names and should be given reassurance on the issue of confidentiality. If they persist in wishing to remain anonymous, it is at the Principal's discretion as to what action, if any, should be taken.

Anonymous complaints may be recorded in the complaints log.

6.4 Concerns and Complaints by Students

The principles that apply to parental complaints also applies to complaints and concerns from students.

There are, however, differences in approaches. One important difference is that students should be able to raise concerns with any member of staff with whom they feel comfortable, whether it is a homeroom teacher, class teacher, Head of House or Year, any member of staff, Head of Subschool, Director of Teaching and Learning, Deputy Principal or Principal. Students can access MyGSG and complete the student feedback form.

In more complex situations, once the matter is resolved, the outcome should be discussed with the student by a member of staff, to make sure that it is fully understood, a written record may be provided.

Complaints that appear trivial still need to be handled seriously. Young people may test the complaints procedures on relatively minor issues before finding the confidence to raise something painful, such as bullying.

If the issue is a painful one, or if exploration of it is taking time, a student may need support from another student or from an adult. Students should be encouraged to choose a person with whom they feel comfortable to provide support.

Complaints, and ways of dealing with them, also need to be explained to students. Personal and Social Education programs can be of use, not only in teaching students how they support and act as mentors to others, but also in encouraging them to understand that their views matter.

6.4.1 Lines of approach

Senior and Middle School students

Senior and Middle School students can talk about it, write it down, use the complaints form on MyGSG, Students may wish to talk to their Homeroom teacher, Counsellor, Head of House or Year or approach anyone on staff with whom they feel comfortable, by themselves or as part of a group, or through their parents. The staff member will deal

with the issue in person or will go, on the student's behalf, to someone who can assist. The concern or complaint will be dealt with discreetly and in the best interests of those involved.

Junior School Students

Junior School students can talk about it, use the complaints form on MyGSG, write it down and talk to their classroom teacher, Counsellor, Head of Junior School or anyone on staff who they are comfortable with, by themselves or as part of a group or through their parents. If possible the staff member will deal with the issue in person or go on the student's behalf to someone who can assist. The concern or complaint will be dealt with discreetly and in the best interest of those involved.

6.5 OUTCOMES

Outcomes will vary from case to case depending on the nature and circumstances of each. Outcomes could include:

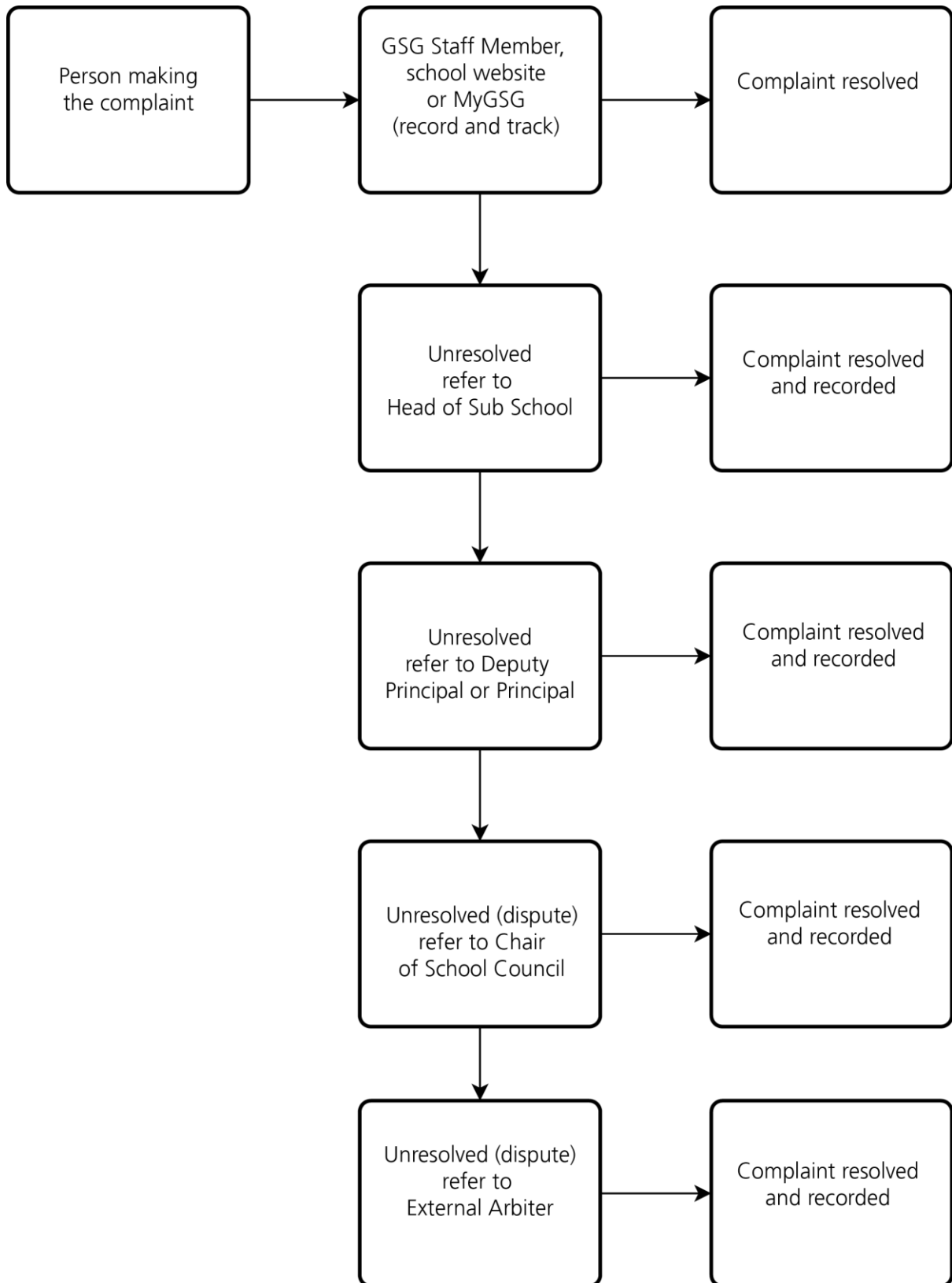
- The complainant gaining a better understanding of the situation and no longer feeling wronged.
- The complainant receiving a verbal or written apology
- The respondent receiving a verbal or written reprimand
- One of both parties agreeing to participate in some form of counselling
- Disciplinary action where a school policy or rule were found to have been breached or where misconduct/serious misconduct or unsatisfactory performance has occurred.

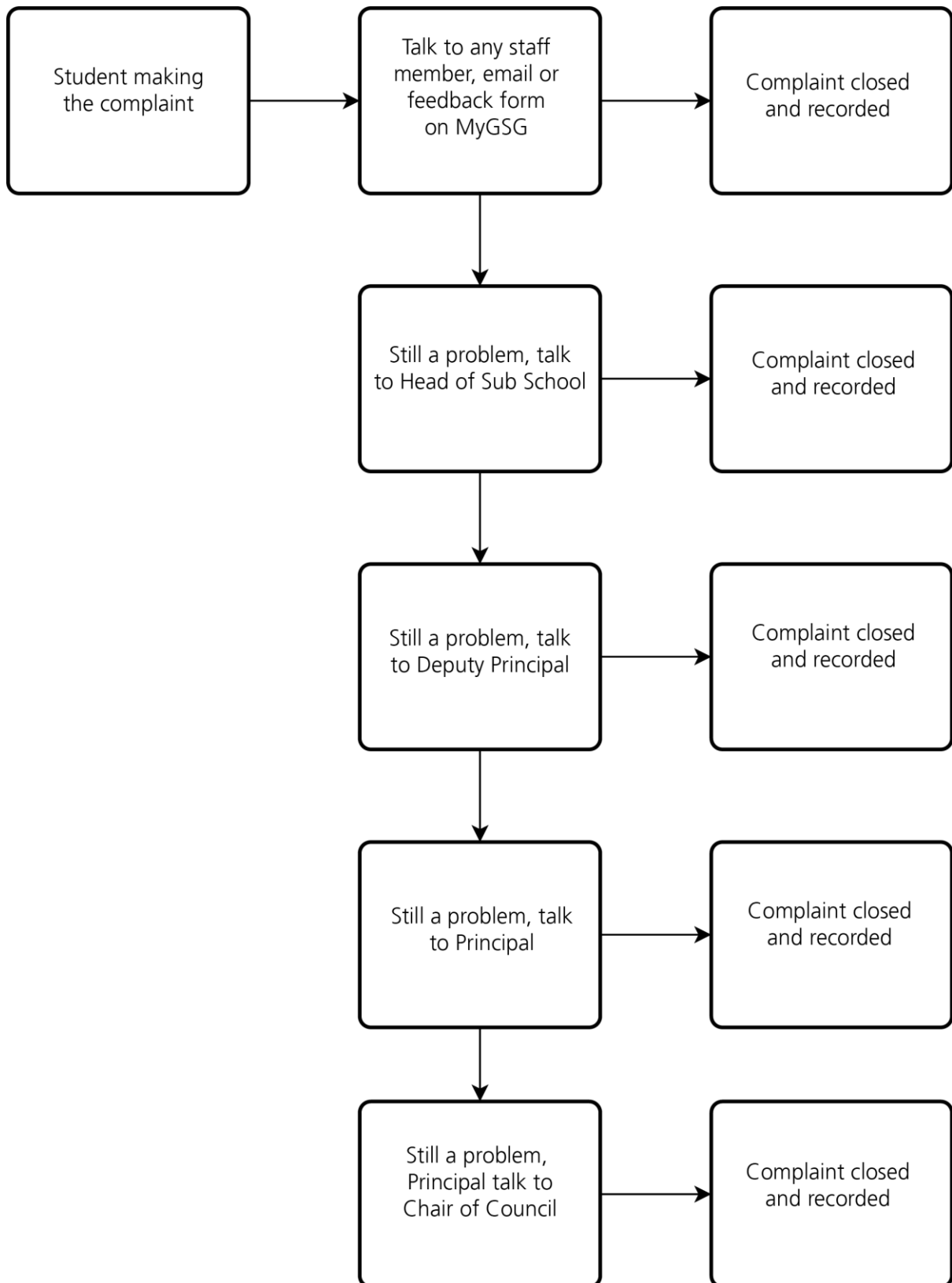
Disciplinary action may also be taken where

- A grievance is found to have been malicious or vexatious
- A person victimises another person because of their involvement in the grievance
- Unnecessary disclosure of information (breach of confidentiality) has occurred.

6.6 Flowcharts of Complaints Procedures

6.6.1 Flowchart of Parent and Members of the Public Complaints Procedure



6.6.2 Flowchart of Student Complaints Procedure

7 REFERENCE/COMPLIANCE

The following documents are associated with this policy:

7.1 Legislation

- *School Education Act 1999*
- *Equal Opportunity Act 1984*
- *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986 (Cth)*
- *Racial Discrimination Act 1974 (Cth)*
- *Working with Children Act 2004*
- *Working with Children Regulations 2005*

7.2 Related Policies

- *Child Protection Policy*
- *Code of Conduct*
- *Pastoral Care Policy*
- *Staff Complaints and Grievance Policy*
- *Privacy Policy*

7.3 Internal Documents

- *Student and Parent Complaint Procedures*
- *Unsatisfactory Performance Management Procedures*
- *Student Diaries*

7.4 Other Resources

- *Nil*

8 DOCUMENT CONTROL

Version history

Version	Date	Reason	By
1.0	26/06/2013	Created	Mr Stuart Marquardt - Headmaster
2.0	01/06/2017	Reviewed	Mr Mark Sawle - Principal

Approval

Date	By	Signature
01/06/2017	Mr Mark Sawle - Principal	