

## ***COMPLAINTS, GRIEVANCES & APPEALS POLICY***

**Definitions:** A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction. A grievance is the cause for complaint (the cause may be an outcome/person or persons) and an appeal is to apply for reconsideration of a decision or outcome.

Staff at Alice Miller School, which includes Candlebark, are willing to assist students and parents with a range of concerns or issues that may arise. The following information provides a guide to the correct process to use.

### **Informal Complaint**

- In general most complaints should be capable of being resolved informally. A few may need a more formal process.
- In the first instance, the person making the complaint should contact the teacher responsible for the child's welfare (as per names supplied at the beginning of each school year) and state his or her concern calmly, clearly and courteously.
- The teacher will then investigate the complaint, and where appropriate explain the school policy or procedure on the issue and work out an action plan with the complainant with regard to what if anything the teacher will do on behalf of the school, what the complainant should do, if anything, and when both parties will talk again if this is indicated.
- The teacher may deal with the complaint straight away or refer it to another person. In most cases it is expected that they should be able to resolve the concern straight away.

### **Formal Complaint, Grievance or Appeal**

If the informal complaint is not resolved, the steps outlined below are recommended:

- Each complaint, grievance, appeal is recorded in writing;
- In the first instance the formal complaint, grievance or appeal is lodged with the Principal.
- The Principal will decide how to handle the matter i.e. whether further investigation is needed and how the appeal will be handled;
- The person handling the appeal (the Principal or his delegate) will try to find out about the matter and try to understand the context and causes. The complainant can help by focusing on a positive resolution to the matter;
- Where the complaint is incapable of being resolved at this point, it can be considered by an independent person or panel nominated by the Principal. The complainant should be advised that if the independent person or panel determines that the complaint is frivolous or malicious, the complainant may be held liable for any financial costs incurred by the School (for example, legal costs).
- The complainant/appellant should have an opportunity to formally present his or her case to the independent person or panel, and is given a written statement of the appeal outcomes including the reasons for decisions.
- This process should be completed within a timeline of 28 working days after the formal complaint, grievance or appeal is lodged.

- The person or persons responsible for handling the appeal then must ensure the recorded appeal and outcomes are given to the relevant Business Manager for filing.

Should disputes occur between school and parents we hope that they can be resolved quickly and directly and amicably. In particular we are anxious to avoid the dreaded ‘triangle’, where a student goes home and complains to parents, and parents then ring the school, or arrive at school, full of concern and even indignation. In these situations we will try to use the opportunity to help teach the student about direct communication. Not only does this help develop a vital life skill, but it also helps minimise the damage that can be caused by a student who likes the power and excitement of ‘stirring up’ the important adults in his or her life then sitting back and enjoying the conflict between them.

However there may come a time when the school or the parents and child or children feel that there is no longer a good match between us. In these circumstances we follow a policy of ‘no fault divorce’, where, if it is clear that the situation is not viable, either side can bring it to an end without rancour or finger-pointing. This provision is consistent with Victorian law, which gives independent schools the power to suspend, expel or punish a student; that power arising from the agreement between the school and the parents that their child will obey the rules and regulations of the school.

These circumstances may be such that the “formal complaint, grievance or appeal” process outlined above is seen as irrelevant, and will be bypassed.

Where parents withdraw a child, a term’s notice must be given; otherwise fees for the remainder of the term, and the following term will be charged.

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