

MANAGING CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS POLICY

Preamble

Mount Ridley Prep – 12 College welcomes feedback and is aware that, from time to time, grievances will arise regarding its operation. The College is committed to dealing with all concerns and complaints in a timely manner, allowing the complainant and respondent fair and documented hearings and allowing for reviews if required.

Rationale

The College will deal equitably and effectively with all complaints and grievances in the areas listed below. The aim is to strengthen the quality of service delivery and responsiveness to the community. Indeed, Mount Ridley Prep – 12 College's approach to handling concerns and complaints is based on our values of:

- Providing a safe and supportive learning environment for students;
- Building positive relationships between students, parents, members of the wider community and staff; and
- Providing a safe working environment for staff.

Guiding Principles

Concerns and complaints covered by this policy include:

- General issues of student behaviour that are contrary to the College's code of conduct;
- Incidents of bullying or harassment in the classroom or the College yard;
- Learning programs and assessment and reporting of student learning;
- Communication with parents;
- College fees and payments; and
- General administrative issues.

This policy does not apply to matters where rights and processes for review and appeal already exist. These include:

- Student discipline matters involving expulsions;
- Complaints about employee conduct or performance and complaints that should be dealt with by performance management, grievance resolution or disciplinary action;
- Student critical incident matters; and
- Other criminal matters.

Implementation

Mount Ridley Prep – 12 College believes that all complaints and grievances are best addressed by complainants and staff working in partnership. The following guidelines will be applied in the implementation of this policy.

The College expects a person raising a concern or complaint to:

- Do so promptly, as soon as possible after the issue occurs;

- Provide complete and factual information about the concern or complaint;
- Maintain and respect the privacy and confidentiality of all parties;
- 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 each other's point of view and value difference, rather than judge and blame; and
- Recognise that all parties have rights and responsibilities which must be balanced.

The College will address any concerns and complaints:

- Courteously;
- Efficiently;
- Fairly;
- Promptly, or within the timeline agreed with the person with the concern or complaint; and
- In accordance with due process, principles of natural justice and the Department of Education and Training's (DET) regulatory framework.

Preparation for raising a concern or complaint

Mount Ridley College encourages parents, carers or members of the community who may wish to submit a complaint to:

- Carefully consider the issues they would like to discuss;
- Remember they may not have all the facts relating to the issues that they want to raise;
- Think about how the matter could be resolved; and
- Be informed by checking the policies and guidelines set by DET and the College.

Raising concerns or complaints

In the first instance, a complaint should be made to the College. The complainant should telephone, visit or write to:

- The student's teacher about learning issues and incidents that happened in their class or group;
- The Team Leader if students from more than one class are involved;
- The relevant Director of Student Engagement Strategies for difficult student issues;
- The relevant Assistant Principal about issues relating to staff members or very complex student issues;
- The College Principal about issues relating to school policy, school management, staff members or very complex student issues.

A detailed Communication Directory outlining the names of key personnel who can assist those making enquiries is revised each term and published on the College's webpage. If you are not sure who to contact, call the Main Administration Office on 8338 3600.

Help with raising concerns or complaints

Complainants can seek the services of an advocate when they feel they are unable to express their concern clearly. An advocate can be a friend or someone who is available through an appropriate support organisation who does not receive a fee for service. All

parties involved in addressing a complaint may seek the services of a mediator when there is difficulty coming to an agreement.

Managing parent concerns and complaints information

The College will record the following details of all complaints received:

- Name and contact details of the person with a concern or complaint
- The date the concern was expressed or complaint made;
- The manner 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;
- Details of the staff member responding to the concern or complaint;
- Action taken on the concern or complaint;
- The outcome of the action taken on the concern or complaint; and
- Any recommendations for future improvement in the College's policy or procedures.

However, in the first instance, when the complaint is easily resolved via a telephone conversation, a brief note on the College's Student Management System (Compass) recording the issue and the resolution may be all that is required.

Addressing concerns or complaints

The College will make every effort to resolve concerns and complaints before involving other levels of DET. The College will determine whether a concern or complaint should be managed through its concerns and complaints process or through other complaints processes of DET.

All complaints will be noted and acted on promptly by the staff member who receives the complaint. The College will acknowledge all complaints made in writing if signed by the complainant (usually within two school days). It will provide the complainant with a timeline for investigating the complaint and providing a response to the complainant. Depending on the complexity of the complaint, Mount Ridley College may need some time to gather enough information to fully understand the circumstances of a complaint. The College will endeavour to complete any necessary information gathering and hold a resolution meeting where appropriate within 10 working days of the complaint being raised. In situations where further time is required, Mount Ridley College will consult with the complainant and discuss any interim solutions to the dispute that can be put in place. Concerns and complaints about general College matters (such as the timing of events, College policies and facilities) will be addressed by the College Principal or a relevant staff member.

Should the complaint involve complex issues, the College will take advice from DET, which may take more time. The College will inform the complainant about the new timeline for addressing these types of complaints and the reasons for any delays. In some circumstances, Mount Ridley College may also ask the complainant to attend a meeting with an independent third party, or participate in a mediation with an accredited mediator to assist in the resolution of the dispute.

Anonymous complaints

DET requires all complaints to be considered. However, it recognises that its staff might not be able to fully consider a complaint if they cannot effectively liaise with an anonymous complainant. Furthermore, anonymous complaints raise natural justice issues for respondents who have a right to know particulars of the allegations made against them. Staff responsible for handling complaints should determine, in consultation with other relevant personnel from the Central Office or Region, the extent to which an anonymous complaint received by the College shall be investigated.

Remedies

If a concern for complaint is substantiated in whole or part, the College will offer an appropriate remedy. At its discretion and depending on the circumstances, the College will offer:

- An explanation or further information about the issue;
- Mediation, counselling or other support;
- An apology or expression of regret;
- To change its decision;
- To change its policies, procedures or practices;
- To cancel a debt (such as for school payments); and/or
- Provide a fee refund.

The College will implement the remedy as soon as practicable.

In situations where the complaint is not justified, the initial decision of the College will be confirmed. This could include:

- An explanation of how the decision is consistent with College policy;
- That the decision taken is realistic and is supported by an external agency that specialises in the area under consideration; and/or
- Department policy and guidelines support the decision.

Appeal of Concerns and Grievances

Complainants have the right to appeal the findings of this process to the College's Appeal Panel consisting of a Mini School Assistant Principal and two members of the College Leadership Team (all of whom have not been directly involved in the issue). The finding of the Appeals Panel will take the form of a recommendation to the College Principal who may either accept or reject that recommendation. In the event of the recommendation being rejected, the College Principal will provide a response to all parties.

If a person with a concern or complaint is not satisfied with the outcome determined by the College, including the appeal discussion, they should contact DET's North Western Regional Office on 9488 9488. The officer from the Region will ask the complainant's opinion about why the College was unable to resolve it to their satisfaction.

Mount Ridley College may also refer a complaint to the Regional Office if it believes that it has done all it can to address the complaint.

If the complaint cannot be resolved by the complainant, College and Regional Office personnel working together, the Regional Office may refer it to DET's Regional Services

Group (RSG). The RSG will ask the complainant for a complete and factual account in writing of the concern or complaint and the complainant's opinion about why the College and Regional Office did not resolve it to their satisfaction and will ask the complainant to outline their view on the course of action required to resolve the complaint. Where the complainant is unable to provide a written account, the officer from the RSG will act on the information provided.

Communication

The College will make information about procedures for addressing concerns and complaints readily available to parents and the College community.

The information will include:

- How a person can make a complaint;
- The person's responsibilities;
- Information to be provided by the person;
- Who the person should contact and their contact details; and
- The process and time frames for managing complaints.

The College's procedures for addressing concerns and complaints will be:

- Published on the College's website; and
- Printed in the College newsletter.

The College will:

- Brief all members of staff (including volunteers) about its procedures to address concerns and complaints annually; and
- Provide staff with (or provide access to) training and support appropriate to their responsibilities under the procedures.

Evaluation

The College will monitor all concerns and complaints and consider issues raised through the complaints process, and any other relevant information collated from DET's opinion surveys, when undertaking a review of the College's policies, procedures and operations.

The College will review its information about complaints made over time to:

- Identify common or recurring issues that may need addressing;
- Assess the effectiveness of these and other procedures and whether they are being followed; and
- Use information provided to the College through the parent and student opinion surveys on the views of parents and students.

As part of the College's review cycle this policy will be reviewed every three years or when changes are made to DET guidelines.

Date policy ratified: 16th June, 2020

Date of next review: 2023

References:

- *DET School Policy and Advisory Guide – Parent Complaints*
- *Mount Ridley Prep – 12 College Respectful Relationships Protocol*
- *Mount Ridley Prep – 12 College Statement of Values and College Philosophy Policy*
- *Mount Ridley Prep – 12 College Communication Directory*