

# HORIZONS COLLEGE – POLICY & PROCEDURE

## COMPLAINTS HANDLING POLICY



**Purpose:** The purpose of this policy is to provide written processes about receiving, assessing, investigating and otherwise dealing with complaints.<sup>1</sup>

**Scope:** Any person directly affected by the subject of a complaint. Examples may include staff, students or a student’s parent or guardian, contractors, or community members.

<b>Policy Name:</b>	Complaints Handling Policy		Version 202601_01
<b>Policy Type:</b>	Mandatory Policies, Frameworks & Strategies*		
<b>Supersedes:</b>	Complaints Handling Policy – Version 202507_01 Complaints Handling Procedures - -Version 202501_01		
<b>Authorised by:</b>	School Governing Body	<b>Date of Authorisation:</b>	January 2026
<b>Review Date:</b>	Annually	<b>Next Review Date:</b>	January 2027
<b>Policy Owner:</b>	School Governing Body		

Note: Policy types marked with asterisks as follows are:

\* published on school website

\*\* only mandatory for schools incorporated through the *Corporations Act 2001* (Cth)

<sup>1</sup> [Education \(Accreditation of Non-State Schools\) Regulations 2017, s.7](#)

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### References:

- [Education \(Accreditation of Non-State Schools\) Regulation 2017 \(Qld\)](#)
- [Fair Work Act 2009 \(Cth\)](#)
- [Work Health and Safety Act 2011 \(Qld\)](#)
- [Privacy Act 1988 \(Cth\)](#)
- [Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 \(Qld\)](#)
- [Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986 \(Cth\)](#)
- [Sex Discrimination Act 1984 \(Cth\)](#)
- [Age Discrimination Act 2004 \(Cth\)](#)
- [Disability Discrimination Act 1992 \(Cth\)](#)
- [Racial Discrimination Act 1975 \(Cth\)](#)
- [Standards Australia, Guidelines for complaint management in organizations \(ISO 10002:2022, NEQ\)](#)
- [Child Safe Organisations Act 2024 \(Qld\)](#)
- [Child Safe Organisations | Queensland Family and Child Commission](#)
- Horizons College *Student Safety and Wellbeing Policy*
- Horizons College Child Protection Policy
- Horizons College Work Health and Safety Policy
- Horizons College Positive Behaviour Support Policy
- Horizons College Anti-bullying Policy
- Horizons College Staff Code of Conduct
- Horizons College Anti-Discrimination Policy
- Horizons College Sexual Harassment Policy
- Horizons College Student Disability Discrimination Policy
- Horizons College Workplace Bullying Policy
- Horizons College Privacy Policy
- Horizons College Board Charter
- Horizons College Sexual Harassment Policy

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### Policy Statement

Horizons College acknowledges the right of students, parents/parents, staff and others to complain when dissatisfied with the school's services, including an action, inaction or decision of the school. The school encourages constructive criticism and complaints. Horizons College is committed to ensuring that complaints received are handled in a responsive, efficient, consistent, effective, transparent and fair way.

Horizons College will ensure staff can recognise, receive, and appropriately refer complaints to the informal or formal complaints procedure.

Horizons College recognises that time spent on handling complaints can be an investment in better service to students and parents/carers and a better culture for staff, and views complaints as part of an important feedback and accountability process.

Horizons College promotes a safe, inclusive and culturally responsive environment for all students, ensuring their safety and wellbeing are prioritised. Horizons College is committed to students exercising their right to speak up and participate in school processes and decisions that affect them.

### Definitions

<b>Complaint</b>	An expression of dissatisfaction made to or about the school, related to the school's services, staff or the handling of a complaint, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required. <sup>2</sup>
<b>Informal Complaint</b>	A complaint about a matter that is likely to be simple, straight forward, easily manageable, or minor, where a simple or quick resolution is appropriate such as discussion of the matter with a relevant staff member.
<b>Formal Complaint</b>	A complaint about a matter that is serious, complex or may pose a threat to the health and safety of any person. Examples include serious allegations or breaches of policy, complaints against a senior staff member, including the principal or an informal complaint that could not be resolved informally. Assessment of the complaint is required by <<add role or roles e.g. a relevant member of the senior leadership team>>.
<b>Complainant</b>	The person, organisation or their representative making a complaint. <sup>3</sup>
<b>Respondent</b>	The person who is referred to in a complaint by a complainant as the person responsible for their concerns or who can best respond to their concern.

### Complaints Handling Principles

Horizons College will manage complaints according to the following (which include principles of procedural fairness):

- complaints will be taken seriously, dealt with fairly and objectively, without judgement and addressed in a reasonable timeframe
- complaints should be resolved with as little formality and disruption as possible, having regard to the nature of the complaint

<sup>2</sup> Standards Australia, Guidelines for complaint management in organizations (ISO 10002:2018, NEQ), s.4.3

<sup>3</sup> Standards Australia, Guidelines for complaint management in organizations (ISO 10002:2018, NEQ), s.4.2

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- interested parties to the complaint (for example, the complainant and any respondent) will be heard and/or may provide relevant information in relation to the complaint
- confidentiality and privacy will be maintained as much as possible
- a child-centred approach will be maintained, and all complaints will be managed in a manner that prioritises the student's safety, wellbeing, and voice
- a trauma-informed and culturally safe approach to managing complaints will be prioritised
- the complainant and any respondent will be offered support as appropriate
- victimising behaviour towards a complainant, respondent or other people associated with the complaint, will not be tolerated
- complainants that lodge a complaint on reasonable grounds will not suffer any other reprisals on the basis of the lodging the complaint

### Complaints that may be Resolved under this Policy

Horizons College encourages anyone who feels impacted by an issue involving the school to file a complaint.

Complaints can address matters such as:

- the school, its staff or students having done something wrong
- the school, its staff or students having failed to do something they should have done
- the school, its staff or students having acted unfairly or impolitely
- issues of student or staff behaviour that are contrary to the relevant Staff Code of Conduct or Positive Behaviour Support Policy, including inappropriate staff conduct as reported by a student.<sup>4</sup>
- issues related to learning programs, assessment and reporting of student learning
- issues related to communication with students or parents or between staff
- issues related to school fees and payments
- general administrative issues
- issues relating to non-compliance with a process outlined in school policies or procedures, for example the child protection policy, discrimination policy, or privacy policy.<sup>5</sup>

Student complaints may be brought by students or by parents on behalf of their children, as appropriate in the circumstances.

### Issues Outside this Policy

The following matters are outside the scope of this policy and should be managed as follows:

- Child protection concerns including allegations of sexual abuse, likely sexual abuse or harm to children should be dealt in accordance with the school's Child Protection Policy.
- Student bullying complaints should be dealt with under the Student Bullying Policy or Positive Behaviour Support Policy.
- Student discipline matters, including matters involving suspension or expulsion, should be dealt with under the Positive Behaviour Support Policy.
- Student or staff violence or criminal matters should be directed to the principal who will involve the Police as appropriate.
- Disputes relating to a staff member's employment should be directed to their manager and dealt with under the enterprise agreement and/or employment law.

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<sup>4</sup> Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Regulation 2017 s.16(2)(a)

<sup>5</sup> Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Regulation 2017 s.16(5)

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- Disputes involving Directors of Horizons College of Learning and Enrichment Ltd, or between the Board of Horizons College of Learning and Enrichment Ltd and its sole Member, Worklinks Qld Ltd, are not managed under this policy and must be dealt with in accordance with the Constitution of Horizons College of Learning and Enrichment Ltd and the governance documents of Worklinks Qld Ltd.
- Formal legal proceedings should be managed as appropriate in the circumstances.
- Complaints relating to the education and training services provided by the school to an overseas student should be dealt with in accordance with the *Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000* and National Code and the school's Overseas Student's Complaints and Appeals Policy and Process.

### Responsibilities

#### School

The school has the following roles and responsibilities:

- develop, implement, promote and act in accordance with the school's Complaints Handling Policy
- appropriately communicate the school's Complaints Handling Policy to students, parents and staff
- ensure that the Complaints Handling Policy are readily accessible by staff, students and parents
- upon receipt of a complaint, manage the complaint in accordance with the Complaints Handling Policy
- ensure that appropriate support is made available to all parties to a complaint
- take appropriate action to prevent victimisation or action in reprisal against the complainant, respondent or any person associated with them
- appropriately implement remedies
- appropriately train relevant staff
- keep records
- conduct a review/audit of the Complaints Register in regular intervals
- report to the school's insurer when that is relevant.

#### All Parties to a Dispute

The complainant and respondent both have the following roles and responsibilities:

- comply with the school's Complaints Handling Policy
- provide complete and factual information in a timely manner
- not provide deliberately false or misleading information
- not make frivolous or vexatious complaints or retaliatory complaints
- act in good faith and maintain a mutually beneficial relationship of trust and cooperation
- act in a calm, courteous manner and non-threatening manner
- acknowledge that a common goal is to achieve an outcome acceptable to all parties
- recognise that all parties have rights and responsibilities which must be balanced
- maintain and respect the privacy and confidentiality of all parties
- not victimise or act in reprisal against any party to the dispute or any person associated with them.

#### Staff Receiving and/or Managing Complaints

Staff receiving and/or managing complaints have the following roles and responsibilities:

- act in accordance with the school's Complaints Handling Policy
- refer the complainant to the school's Complaints Handling Policy and provide additional information as necessary
- maintain confidentiality as far as possible

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- keep appropriate records
- forward complaints to more senior staff, including the Principal, if the complaint cannot be resolved at the initial level or if it involves serious issues that require the involvement of more senior staff
- not victimise or act in reprisal against the complainant, respondent or any person associated with them.

### Implementation

Horizons College is committed to raising awareness of the process for resolving complaints at the school, including by the development and implementation of this policy and via the clear support and promotion of the policy.

Horizons College will support and promote this policy by:

- publishing the Complaints Handling Policy and complaint lodgement information on the school website;
- including information about complaints processes in the Parent and Carer Handbook and Student Handbook;
- discussing complaints processes with students in age-appropriate and accessible ways, including through wellbeing lessons, student meetings and individual support sessions;
- providing clear information to parents and carers at enrolment and through ongoing communications; and
- making support available to students, parents/carers and staff who wish to raise a complaint.

Horizons College is also committed to regular training of staff on the implementation of this policy. Staff will receive training on complaints handling processes during induction and at least annually thereafter, including refresher training where changes to the policy or procedures occur.

### Complaint Register

Horizons College will maintain a complaint register with details such as the date, source and description of complaints, the staff managing the complaint, the actions taken, outcome and the date the complaint was closed.

The complaint register will be stored securely.

All complaints shall be entered onto the complaint register as soon as practicable after the complaint is received. The complaint register will not contain complaints about the Principal. Records of complaints about the Principal will be maintained by the Board with access restricted to the Board.

To safeguard confidentiality and maintain the integrity of the complaint process, access to the entire complaint register will be limited to the Principal.

The Principal may authorise the sharing of specific, relevant entries from the complaint register with other designated staff members (such as the senior leadership team), provided measures are taken to protect the confidentiality of all parties involved, particularly ensuring that respondents to a complaint do not gain inappropriate access to information about the allegations against them.

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### Complaint Handling Procedure

#### 1. Lodging a Complaint

- a) Complaints can be lodged with the most appropriate staff member at the local level, for example, the initial contact point for many complaints is the student's relevant classroom teacher.
- b) Complaints about the principal must be lodged with the Board.
- c) Complaints can be lodged through various methods, including:
  - i. Phone
  - ii. Email
  - iii. In-person (by appointment)
- d) If the complainant is unsure where to direct their complaint, they can contact the school's administration office for guidance.
- e) If the complainant is uncomfortable directing the complaint to the most appropriate member at the local level, or wants to make a formal complaint, they can submit a complaint by emailing the Principal.
- f) Where an anonymous complaint is lodged, the school will follow the complaints handling policy, when there is sufficient information to do so.

#### 2. Acknowledgement, Assessment and Referral

- a) The staff member receiving the complaint will:
  - i. acknowledge the complaint within two (2) business days, outlining the next steps and where possible the estimated timeframes.
  - ii. assess the complaint, using the definitions of informal and formal complaints in this policy, and refer the complaint to the informal or formal complaints process.

#### 3. Registration and Support

- a) The recipient of the complaint will promptly ensure that the complaint is recorded in the school's complaints register, using the school's approved complaints recording system, regardless of whether the matter proceeds through the informal or formal process.
- b) The recipient of the complaint will offer support to the complainant as appropriate, which may include assistance with completing forms or understanding procedures.
- c) If a student is a complainant, respondent or victim, or the child of a complainant, respondent or victim of a matter being managed through this policy, the school may offer the student support where appropriate e.g. discussing suitable adjustments with parents/caregivers.

#### 4. Informal Complaints Handling Process

- a) The informal process is designed to resolve issues promptly and collaboratively at the local level.
- b) It may involve constructive discussion and negotiation between the complainant and the relevant staff member(s).
- c) If the complaint cannot be resolved informally, it will be escalated to the formal process.

#### 5. Formal Complaints Handling Process

- a) The formal process begins with the assessment of the complaint by a designated staff member (e.g., a member of the senior leadership team or the board chair for complaints against the principal)

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- b) The staff member may gather additional information through investigation, interviews, or evidence review. The staff member may consult with appropriate members of the student's or the family's community
- c) The staff member will determine appropriate action, which may include:
  - iii. Mediation
  - iv. Disciplinary measures
  - v. Implementation of policy changes
  - vi. Referral to external agencies (e.g., police)
  - vii. Provision of written updates to the complainant throughout the process
  - viii. Other actions the <<add in role e.g. principal>> determine as appropriate in the circumstances.

### 6. Complaint Closure

- a) The complaint register will be updated with the date the complaint is closed and a brief summary of the outcome.
- b) The complainant will receive written notification of the outcome and any actions taken where appropriate.

### 7. Appeals Process

- a) Complainants may appeal the outcome of a complaint by writing to:
  - i. the principal (for complaints not previously managed by the principal,)
  - ii. the board chair (for complaints previously managed by the principal, or complaints about the principal).