

Complaints Handling Policy

Purpose:	The purpose of this policy is to ensure that student, parent and employee complaints and disputes are dealt with in a responsive, efficient, effective and fair way.	
Scope:	Students, parents and employees, including full-time, part-time, permanent, fixed-term and casual employees, as well as contractors, volunteers and people undertaking work experience or vocational placements.	
Status:	APPROVED	Supersedes: Complaints Handling Policy (2024)
Authorised by:	Board Chair	Date of Authorisation: 27/5/2026
References:	• Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Regulations 2017 • Fair Work Act 2009 • 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 • The School of Total Education Student Safety and Wellbeing Policy • The School of Total Education Child Protection Policy • The School of Total Education Work Health and Safety Policy • The School of Total Education Anti-Discrimination Policy • The School of Education Code of Conduct • The School of Total Education Sexual Harassment Policy • The School of Total Education Disability Discrimination Policy • The School of Total Education Workplace Bullying Policy • The School of Total Education Privacy Policy	
Review Date:	Annually	Next Review Date: May 2027
Policy Owner:	School Governing Body	

Policy Statement

The School of Total Education acknowledges the right of students, parents/guardians, 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.

The School of Total Education is committed to ensuring that complaints received are handled in a responsive, efficient, consistent, effective, transparent and fair way.

The School of Total Education will ensure employees can recognise, receive, and appropriately refer complaints to the informal or formal complaints procedure.

The School of Total Education recognises that time spent on handling complaints can be an investment in better service to students and parents/guardians and a better culture for employees, and views complaints as part of an important feedback and accountability process.

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

Definitions

Complaint	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.
Informal Complaint	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. resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required.
Formal Complaint	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 the Principal, HR Manager or a member of the Management Group
Complainant	The person, organisation or their representative making a complaint.
Respondent	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 that may be Resolved under this Policy

The School of Total Education encourage students, parents and employees to promptly lodge any concerns regarding sexual harassment, child protection, discrimination, workplace bullying and privacy breaches as well as more general complaints that include areas such as:

- the school, its employees or students having done something wrong
- the school, its employees or students having failed to do something they should have done
- the school, its employees or students having acted unfairly or impolitely
- issues of student or employee behaviour that are contrary to our Code of Conduct
- issues related to learning programs, assessment and reporting of student learning
- issues related to communication with students or parents or between employees
- issues related to school fees and payments
- general administrative issues.
- Issues relating to the non-compliance with a process outlined in a school policy or procedure

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 schools Child Protection Policy.
- Student bullying complaints should be dealt with under the (Student) Anti-Bullying Policy.
- Student discipline matters, including matters involving suspension or expulsion, will be dealt with by the Principal and the Management Committee.
- Employee complaints related to their employment should be directed to the HR Manager, their supervisor or the Principal.
- Student or employee 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 the HR Manager and dealt with under employment law
- Formal legal proceedings should be managed as appropriate in the circumstances.

Complaints Handling Principles

The School of Total Education is committed to managing complaints according to the following principles:

- 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 disputation as possible, having regard to the nature of the complaint.
- Interested parties to the complaint (for example, the complaint 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 complainant, will not be tolerated.
- Complainants that lodge a complaint on reasonable grounds will not suffer any other reprisals on the basis of lodging the complaint.
- Anonymous complaints will be treated on their merits, and such complaints will be dealt with fairly and objectively and in a timely manner
- The School of Total Education will determine the appropriate person to deal with the complaint in the first instance.
- Mediation, negotiation and informal resolution are optional alternatives
- The School of Total Education will give reasonable progress updates
- Appropriate remedies will be offered and implemented
- Provide a review pathway for parties to the complaint if warranted
- The school will keep records of complaints
- The school's insurer will be informed if a complaint could be connected to an insured risk.

Responsibilities

School

The school has the following role and responsibilities:

- develop, implement, promote and act in accordance with the school's Complaints Handling Policy and Procedures
- appropriately communicate the school's Complaints Handling Policy and Procedure to students, parents and employees
- ensure that the Complaints Handling Policy and Procedure are readily accessible by staff, students and parents
- upon receipt of a complaint, manage the complaint in accordance with the Complaints Handling Procedure
- ensure that appropriate support is provided 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 employees
- keep records
- conduct an annual review of the Complaints Register
- monitor and report to the governing body on complaints
- report to the school's insurer when that is relevant
- refer to the school's governing body immediately any claim for legal redress.

All Parties to a Dispute

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

- apply and comply with the school's Complaints Handling Policy and Procedure
- lodge the complaint as soon as possible after the issue arises
- expect that the complaint will be dealt with fairly and objectively; in a timely manner; with procedural fairness wherever practicable; that confidentiality and privacy will be maintained as much as possible
- provide complete and factual information in a timely manner
- not provide deliberately false or misleading information
- not make frivolous or vexatious 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
- to be appropriately supported
- 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.

Employees Receiving and/or Managing Complaints

Employees receiving and/or complaints have the following roles and responsibilities:

- act in accordance with the school's Complaints Handling Policy and Procedure
- inform the party lodging the complaint of how complaints can be lodged, when they should be lodged and what information is required
- provide the complainant with information about any support or assistance available to assist them in lodging their complaint
- ensure the complainant has a copy of the school's Complaints Handling Policy and Procedure
- maintain confidentiality as far as possible
- keep appropriate records
- forward complaints to more senior employees, 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 employees
- not victimise or act in reprisal against the complainant, respondent or any person associated with them.

Parents Complaints and Concerns

The SOTE Parent Handbook (hardcopies are available from the office) outlines avenues for concerned parents to raise any issues and grievances they have in relation to their child or the school. This states:

- Any concerns they have in relation to their child's progress should in the first instance be raised with their child's class or homegroup teacher. If this is an ongoing issue, parents are then encouraged to make an appointment with the teacher and a follow up with the year level Coordinator
- If any issue needs to be escalated beyond your relevant coordinator, a time can be made through the office to speak with the Deputy Principal and/or Principal

- Any concerns relating to the Principal can either be made directly to the Principal - if the Complainant is comfortable to do so - otherwise directly to the Governing Council by emailing the Board Chair - GoverningCouncilMembers@sote.onmicrosoft.com Any concerns raised which relate to the manner in which the Principal and/or staff have acted from an operational or management perspective are to be reviewed by the Governing Council in order to make a determination on whether the Principal and/or staff acted in accordance with the Schools' Policy and Procedure.

The School of Total Education is committed to ensuring all complaints are dealt with in a fair and equitable manner. To achieve an effective resolution parents are encouraged to provide factual information in a timely manner; deliver a complaint in a calm and reasoned manner; not make false complaints

Implementation

The School of Total Education is committed to raising awareness of the process for resolving complaints at the school, including by the development and implementation of this policy and related procedures, and via the clear support and promotion of the policy and procedures.

The School of Total Education is also committed to appropriately training relevant employees (especially senior staff) on how to resolve complaints in line with this policy and the related procedures.

The School of Total Education will keep appropriate records of complaints, will monitor complaints and their resolution and will report on a high-level basis to the school Board on complaint handling at the school. All complaints will be recorded on the Complaints Register.

The School of Total Education will act to encourage students, parents and employees to contribute to a healthy school culture where complaints are resolved with as little formality and disruption as possible.

If the need arises, The School of Total Education will appoint an appropriate employee as an Equity Contact Officer to provide confidential and impartial information about the school's relevant policies and processes.

Complaints Register

The School of Total Education will maintain a complaint register with details such as the date, source and description of complaints, the employee managing the complaint, the actions taken, outcome and the date the complaint was closed.

The complaint register will be stored securely on SharePoint (APPENDIX 1)

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 and HR Manager

The Principal may authorise the sharing of specific, relevant entries from the complaint register with other designated staff members (such as the Management 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.

Procedure

1. Before initiating a complaint to be investigated, complainants are encouraged to try to resolve any grievance directly with the person/s concerned. If this is not possible or appropriate, the complainant should proceed to Step 2 of this procedure.
2. Where the complainant has been unable to resolve the grievance him/herself, the complainant should take the matter up with their Supervisor, Coordinator, or an appropriate staff member. Where the grievance involves their Supervisor, the staff member should refer the matter to the Principal.
3. A complaint can be made via, telephone, email or in person.
4. Any person receiving a complaint will acknowledge and refer the complaint within two days.
5. The Supervisor will address the complaint with a view to resolving it expeditiously, normally within two weeks of receiving the complaint.
6. All complaints will be entered onto the complaints register
7. Where an anonymous complaint is lodged, the school will follow the complaints handling policy, when there is sufficient information to do so.
8. Following resolution of the complaint, the Management Committee will monitor the situation for a period of time.
9. If any action is to be taken, the Principal will ensure procedural fairness for all parties involved, including informing any respondents of the allegations made against them and providing them with an opportunity to respond.
10. If the complainant believes the grievance has not been resolved to their satisfaction by reference to their Supervisor, they can refer the matter to the Principal. The Principal may require the complainant to put the grievance in writing. The Principal will attempt to resolve the matter within two weeks of receiving the grievance and will follow similar procedures outlined above for action by the Supervisor.
11. If the grievance remains unresolved, it may be referred in writing to a relevant and independent person by the complainant or the Principal.
12. After giving due consideration to the grievance the independent person may do one or more of the following:
 - refer the complaint back to the Principal or to a nominee, with advice for resolution; or
 - initiate an investigation into the matter; or
 - seek to resolve the matter directly;
13. All complaints should be closed with a summary of actions written into the register, including any actionable outcomes (eg. Mediation; disciplinary measures; policy changes; external referrals)
14. The complainant should receive written notification of the outcome of their complaint

Any determination made by the independent person in accordance with Steps 7 and 8 of this procedure with regard to the grievance will be final.

Version Date	Date / Changes Made	Changes made by	Approval Date
V4 18/8/2020	For Review July 2023 Added Procedure for handling a staff complaint Added referrals for unresolved grievances to go to an independent person Created and added reference to Complaints Handling Register Add section reinforcing the actions for parents as per the Parent Handbook	Letitia Governing Council Governing Council Governing Council	11/9/2023 11/9/2023 11/9/2023 11/9/2023
V5 11/9/2023	For Review March 2024 Reworded Policy Statement in line with ISQ template Added definition table, as per the ISQ template Added a complaint example, relating to the non-compliance of school policies, as per the ISQ template Added the reference to sexual abuse to the section on issues unrelated to this policy as per the ISQ template Added reference to the Complaints Register, as per ISQ Template Updated Complaints Handling Procedure Amend Parents Complaints & Concerns to keep in line with Parent Handbook	Letitia Letitia Letitia Letitia Letitia Letitia Letitia Letitia	22/4/2024 22/4/2024 22/4/2024 22/4/2024 22/4/2024 22/4/2024 22/4/2024 22/4/2024
V6 22/4/2024	For Review May 2026 Updated Acts, Regulation and Policy links Added a clause in the policy statement to include the schools promotion of a safe and culturally inclusive environment Add handling principles related to a child centered approach and trauma informed practices to maintain student safety, voice and being culturally aware	Letitia Letitia Letitia	27/5/2026 27/5/2026 27/5/2026

	Reviewed and updated the reference to the Parent Handbook	Letitia	27/5/2026
	Added a step for complaints relating to the Principal to be referred to the Governing Council and addressed by the Board	Letitia	27/5/2026

APPENDIX (1)

The School of Total Education Complaints Register					
Date Complaint Received	Complaint Received By	Name of Complainant	Nature of Complaint	Internal Notification of Complaint	Status
		_____ ☐ Made by Complainant ☐ Made on Complainants behalf by:		Date: _____ ☐ To Management Committee ☐ To Principal	☐ Being Investigated ☐ Resolution Proposed ☐ Resolved ☐ Unresolved
		_____ ☐ Made by Complainant ☐ Made on Complainants behalf by:		Date: _____ ☐ To Management Committee ☐ To Principal	☐ Being Investigated ☐ Resolution Proposed ☐ Resolved ☐ Unresolved
		_____ ☐ Made by Complainant ☐ Made on Complainants behalf by:		Date: _____ ☐ To Management Committee ☐ To Principal	☐ Being Investigated ☐ Resolution Proposed ☐ Resolved ☐ Unresolved
		_____ ☐ Made by Complainant ☐ Made on Complainants behalf by:		Date: _____ ☐ To Management Committee ☐ To Principal	☐ Being Investigated ☐ Resolution Proposed ☐ Resolved ☐ Unresolved