

GRIEVANCES POLICY

1. OVERVIEW

Fintona Girls' School (the School) is committed to ensuring an environment of open-mindedness and support, through its inclusive culture, respecting differences and celebrating achievements.

Part of this commitment involves ensuring the school community has access to processes that allow for grievances to be managed appropriately, promptly, and fairly.

This policy provides clear and transparent information about how a parent, student, or other member of the school community (other than a staff member) can raise grievances about the School, staff conduct, a student's education and/or student wellbeing, and about how such grievances will be managed and resolved.

Our aim is to ensure that grievances are handled objectively and with sensitivity. In doing so, we will seek to identify both the specific and (where applicable) systemic issues raised by a grievance (thereby enabling future improvements to be identified and implemented).

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to all parents/guardians and other members of the school community.

This policy does not apply to:

- staff grievances, which should be raised in accordance with the School's Staff Grievances Policy;
- student grievances which should be raised in accordance with the School's Student Grievances Policy;
- concerns about child abuse, neglect, safety, suspected grooming or possible sexual offence against a child, which will be addressed in accordance with the School's Child Safety Policy, Child Safety and Mandatory Reporting Policy and Reportable Conduct Policy;
- concerns regarding any serious wrongdoing (including fraudulent, corrupt, or other illegal conduct) within the School which will be addressed in accordance with the School's Whistleblower Policy; and
- legal matters, including requests for compensation, payment, and redress.

3. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

When raising a grievance with the School, a member of the school community can expect to:

- be treated with courtesy and respect;
- have the grievance taken seriously, considered impartially, and dealt with on the merits;
- have the grievance dealt with in a confidential and timely manner;
- have access to appropriate and easily understandable information regarding the grievance resolution process being followed by the School (including this policy);
- be kept informed of the progress and outcome of the grievance; and
- not be victimised, or subjected to reprisal, for raising grievances in good faith.

In turn, the School expects that a member of the school community who raises a grievance will:

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- treat others (including school staff, students, and parents, both former and present) with respect and courtesy;
- raise concerns in the appropriate forum, having regard to the below framework, and as soon as possible after the event giving rise to the grievance has occurred;
- provide complete and factual information about the grievance;
- ask for assistance or further information as needed;
- act in good faith to achieve a reasonable outcome;
- be understanding and accepting of any outcome reached, being mindful that the School must sometimes manage the interests of several students and other individuals when making decisions and may be privy to confidential information not known to the person raising the grievance; and
- not raise frivolous, unfounded, or vexatious grievances.

Our aim is for the prompt resolution of concerns, ideally without there being a need for a formal complaint to be made. As the School Board appoints the Principal to manage the day-to-day operations of the School, a review by the Board Chair should be a last resort.

Timeframes listed in this policy are only a guide and can vary due to the nature of the grievance and surrounding circumstances. Where timeframes set out in this policy cannot be met, the School will strive to communicate with the affected parties about the status of the grievance, and the steps taken (or to be taken) to progress a resolution.

Please note the processes outlined in this policy are intended to be conciliatory, non-adversarial and non-legal.

4. FRAMEWORK

The School's framework for dealing with grievances involves a three-step process, namely:

Stage 1 – A concern is raised with the School

Stage 2 – A complaint is made to the Principal

Stage 3 – A review by the Board Chair is requested

Further details about the 3 stages are set out in **Schedule 1**.

Common considerations when the School is managing grievances are set out in **Schedule 3**.

5. STAGE 1 – RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INITIALLY RAISING CONCERNS

At first instance, you should raise your concerns directly with the School. The School must be aware of a concern and of its substance to address it.

The School believes that a concern is often best resolved closest to its source, and when a concern relates to a student, encourages concerns to be raised with the relevant classroom teacher in the first instance.

However, depending on the nature and severity of an issue, and whether the classroom teacher has a conflict of interest, concerns may instead be raised with another member of staff which may include:

- Classroom Teacher
- Tutor Group Teacher
- Learning Area Leader
- ELC Learning & Operations Leader

- P-6 Curriculum & Pedagogy Leader
- Year Level Coordinator (Year 8, 9 or 10)
- Head of Learning, Teaching & Development
- Head of School/Campus/Deputy Principal
- Business Manager
- Principal

A student can directly raise concerns with the person they feel most comfortable speaking with, which may be their teacher, Tutor Group Teacher, Year Level Coordinator (Year 8, 9 or 10), Head of School, School Counsellor (Child Safety matters), or the Principal.

The following considerations are relevant prior to, and when, raising a concern:

- clearly identify the issue or problem prior to contacting the School;
- decide whether the issue or problem is in the nature of a complaint, concern, enquiry or suggestion. This will help in finding a solution;
- identify the party or parties involved;
- consider the practical outcome you are trying to achieve (while being realistic and open to other outcomes and solutions);
- if there is more than one issue or problem, write a list so that you are adequately prepared and then decide which issue or problem matters most to you;
- consider whether there are any interim measures you would like the School to consider whilst it makes enquiries about the issue or problem;
- make an appointment to meet with the relevant staff member to discuss the concern – the best way to do this is to email the staff member or call Reception to obtain the staff member's email or the best person to contact in relation to your concern, so that you can arrange a mutually convenient time for a telephone call or meeting. When contacting Reception, please identify yourself and the student, the subject of your concern, identify the person you would like to speak with, and provide a brief description of the issue you wish to speak about (for example 'homework', 'wellbeing' or 'grounds maintenance'); and
- remain courteous and calm when conveying your concerns. The School is within its rights to terminate a conversation with the person raising the concern until such time that a courteous and calm conversation can continue.

6. STAGE 2 & 3 – Please refer to **Schedule 1**.

7. DEFINITION

Grievance - a circumstance thought to be unjust against a real or imagined wrong, or causing or likely to cause harm or injury, which gives ground for complaint or resentment.

8. RELATED SCHOOL POLICIES/DOCUMENTS

- SW04.00 Child Safety Policy
- SW03.00 Child Safety Response and Mandatory Reporting Policy
- SW01.00 Information Technology Acceptable Use Policy
- SW06.00 Reportable Conduct Policy
- SW02.00 Social Media and Networking Policy
- SE06.00 Staff Grievances Policy
- SW33.00 Student Grievance Policy
- SE09.00 Termination Policy

- SG01.00 Whistleblower Policy

9. REFERENCE POINTS/BACKGROUND PAPERS

- *Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)*
- *Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth)*
- *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (Vic)*
- Fintona Girls' School Enterprise Agreement 2018-2020 – Section 8 – Dispute Resolution
- *Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic) - Ministerial Order 1359*
- Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017 - Schedule 4 clause 12

10. ACCESSIBILITY

This document is available on:

- inFintona>Staff Services>Policies
- inFintona>Parent Services>Policies and Procedures
- Fintona Board Portal
- Fintona Girls' School website

SCHEDULE 1

Further details about the School's Grievance Resolution Procedure

Stage 1: Raise the concern		
Step	Details	Comment
1	Identify the concern	Clarify your concern: " <i>who, what, when, where, why, and how</i> ". Identify the outcome you are trying to achieve by raising your concern.
2	Raise the concern	The School believes that a concern is often best resolved closest to its source and encourages concerns to be raised with the relevant classroom teacher in the first instance. Depending on the nature and severity of an issue, and whether the classroom teacher has a conflict of interest, concerns may instead be raised directly with another staff member (please see the flowchart in Schedule 2).
3	Acknowledgement	Once a concern is raised, the School will record (either by way of an electronic file note or written correspondence) the details of the concern including your name and contact details. The School's focus will be on understanding the nature of the problem, the party or parties involved, and the nature of any agreeable solutions. A staff member may delegate parts of the complaint-management process and seek the assistance of third parties.
4	Outcome	Where an agreeable solution is available, this will usually be communicated in writing to you (being usually within three (3) business days of the outcome being reached). Where a mutually agreed outcome between the School and the person raising the concern is not appropriate, or possible, the staff member handling the concern will make a decision that best aligns with the School's procedures and legal obligations. This decision will be communicated in writing to you (being usually within three (3) business days of the outcome being reached), and the communication will be kept on the relevant student's (and if appropriate, staff member's) file.

Stage 2: Make a complaint

Step	Details	Comment
1	Make a complaint	<p>If you are not satisfied with the way your concern has been handled, you may choose to make a formal written complaint. Complaints should ordinarily be made within one (1) calendar month of the initial concern first being raised with the School.</p> <p>A formal complaint should at first instance be addressed to the Principal. If the complaint concerns the Principal, the complaint should be made to the Board Chair (see Stage 3), in which case the Chair will manage the process outlined below.</p> <p>You may write to the Principal at principal@fintona.vic.edu.au, or telephone Reception on (03) 9830 1388, to arrange a meeting. Please note that if phoning to arrange a meeting, Reception staff will take your details and forward to the Principal's EA who will be in touch to determine a meeting time as soon as it is practicable to do so.</p>
2	Acknowledge receipt	The Principal will acknowledge receipt of the complaint as soon as practicable (being usually within three (3) business days).
3	Review of complaint	<p>When the Principal is dealing with a complaint, the School's objective is to achieve a resolution by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clarifying the substance of the complaint, and the steps taken by the School to address the initial concern; • identifying whether the complaint raises an issue regarding non-compliance with the School's procedures; • identifying whether the complaint raises an issue that would be more appropriately addressed under the School's Reportable Conduct Policy; • communicating with you and relevant parent(s), student(s) and staff, in an attempt to resolve the issue by agreement (where practicable); and • failing agreement, investigating the complaint and deciding appropriate outcomes in accordance with procedural fairness and natural justice principles. <p>The Principal may delegate parts of the complaint-management process, and seek the assistance of third parties, however any ultimate decision will still be made by the Principal.</p> <p>If the Principal or delegate arranges to speak with you, you may request to have someone else present as a support person. The support person can be a relative or a friend, but please note that the role of a support person is to provide you with support and not to act as an advocate.</p>
4	Outcome	<p>The Principal will aim to communicate the outcome of a complaint in writing within fifteen (15) business days where practicable.</p> <p>The Principal will promptly report any formal complaints, and relevant outcomes, to the School Board.</p>

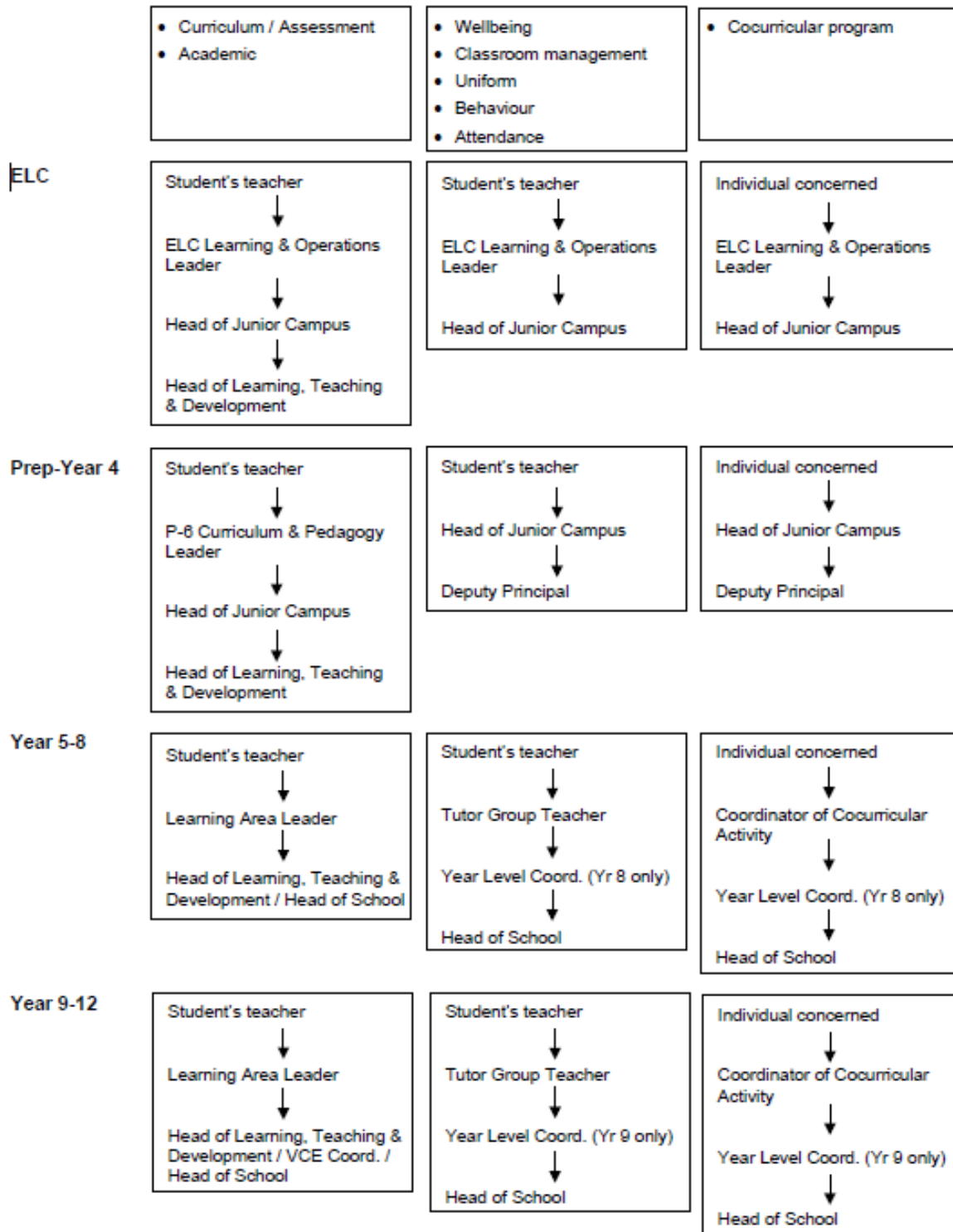
Stage 3 – Request a review

Step	Details	Comment
1	Request a review by the Board Chair	<p>If you are not satisfied that your complaint has been adequately resolved by the Principal, you may request a review by writing to the Board Chair at chair@fintona.vic.edu.au</p> <p>Members of the School community who raise grievances with the School Board will be directed to follow the procedures set out in this policy (eg raising a complaint with the Principal or requesting a review by writing to the Board Chair).</p> <p>Requests for review must be made in writing within ten (10) business days of the date the Principal communicated the outcome of your complaint in writing. The grounds for the review, and in particular any concerns you have with the way the relevant complaint was dealt with, must be clearly identified in the request for review.</p>
2	Review	<p>Please note that in accordance with good governance, the School Board entrusts the Principal with the day-to-day management of the School, and in particular its staff and students. The Principal is accorded significant discretion regarding such matters.</p> <p>Accordingly, any review of the Principal's decision under this policy will be confined to the Board Chair deciding whether there is evidence that the School's procedures have not been followed, in a way likely to have meaningfully influenced the Principal's decision, or that the Principal unreasonably exercised his or her discretion.</p> <p>The Board Chair may delegate parts of the review, or seek the assistance of third parties, however any ultimate decision will still be made by the Board Chair.</p> <p>For the avoidance of doubt, the Board Chair will not delegate to the Principal a review of a decision he or she has already made. However, if the Chair is satisfied that a complaint has not been properly raised (or dealt) with by the Principal (and the Principal does not otherwise have a conflict of interest), the Chair may refer the matter to the Principal to make an initial decision (noting that decision would then create a right to request a review).</p>
6	Outcome	<p>The Board Chair will aim to communicate the outcome of a request for review in writing within forty-five (45) business days where practicable.</p> <p>The Board Chair will promptly report any requests for review, and relevant outcomes, to the School Board.</p>

SCHEDULE 2

FLOWCHART – Resolution of Parent / Student Complaints and Grievances

Concern relates to:



SCHEDULE 3

RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

Withdrawal of a Grievance

A grievance can be withdrawn at any stage during the processes outlined in this policy. A grievance can only be withdrawn by the person who made the complaint to the School.

Ideally, all grievances should be retracted in writing, however a dated notation on the School's systems, stating the grievance has been withdrawn verbally by the appropriate person can be made by a staff member at the School responsible for managing the grievance.

The School will notify affected parties if a grievance is withdrawn, where considered appropriate.

Regardless of a person's wish to withdraw a grievance, complaints that have disciplinary implications for a member of staff may still be followed up by the School.

Anonymous Grievances

The School is committed to dealing with grievances in accordance with the processes outlined in this policy. The School respects in some cases, complainants would prefer to remain anonymous and not put a name to their grievances.

The School treats grievances about the School, a staff member, a student's education and/or a student's wellbeing with the utmost importance and will investigate such grievances raised to the fullest extent practicable. However, anonymity can make it difficult for the School to effectively resolve grievances (particularly where the School is being asked to accept an anonymous source's version of events) and are accordingly discouraged.

Previously Addressed, Stale or Vexatious Grievances

Grievances that have been previously addressed by the School or externally, or which were not raised with the School within a reasonable period of time (having regard to the nature of the relevant grievance), will not be considered in the absence of highly relevant new information and/or evidence coming to light. The School does not tolerate frivolous, unfounded, or vexatious grievances.

External Grievances and Redress

The School acknowledges that grievances relating to the School can also be made to an external body, such as the Victorian Registration & Qualifications Authority, or be the subject of legal action. However, the School encourages its community to raise any grievances, and work to resolve such matters, in accordance with the procedures outlined in this policy.

Confidentiality

Appropriate confidentiality will be maintained by the School at all times when dealing with a grievance, with information only being provided to those who have a right or need to know.

Communication

The policy is available to parents, students and the School community via the School's website or inFintona. This policy (or aspects thereof) will also feature in communications to parents, such as School bulletins as required.