

Schools - guide for parents, carers and students

A guide for parents, carers and students when making a complaint. If you have a concern or complaint about any aspect of our services we're keen to hear from you.

We encourage you to contact the school to talk about your concerns, as most problems can be solved by talking to the school office staff, your child's teacher or the school principal. They know your child and are best placed to help you. Also, it's best if you let them know about your concerns as early as possible.

What can a complaint be about?

You can make a complaint about:

- any aspect of the services we provide
- the behaviour or decisions of staff
- practices, policies or procedures.

How to make a complaint

It is best to discuss your concerns with your child's teacher first. Make an appropriate time to meet with them or phone the school and ask for an appointment with the teacher.

If you are not happy with the result, or if you do not feel it is appropriate to talk to them, phone and make an appointment to discuss your concerns with the principal.

You may bring a friend or relative to be your support. If you need an interpreter, we can arrange that - just ask beforehand.

If your complaint is about the principal you will need to contact the school education director in your area. Ask the school office staff at your school for their name and number.

If your complaint cannot be resolved in an informal way, we may ask you to put it in writing. It is important that you include specific details of the situation and tell us what you would like to happen as a result of your complaint. We can help you to put your complaint in writing, if you require it.

Will my complaint be confidential?

The person dealing with your complaint will advise you if confidentiality applies to your case, but generally it can't be guaranteed. If your complaint is about another person they have a right to know the allegations and be given a chance to respond.

Can I make an anonymous complaint?

Yes, you can make your complaint anonymously. However, it may be difficult to resolve an anonymous complaint if you do not provide your contact details and further information is required.

What you can expect

How your complaint is managed depends on what it is about.

Most complaints can be resolved quickly and informally to everybody's satisfaction simply by talking to the teacher concerned or the principal.

Some complaints are covered by a particular policy or by special legislation (eg occupational health and safety or anti-discrimination policies). You will be advised if this is the case with your complaint. You will be told the name of the person who is dealing with your complaint and their contact number.

Occasionally more serious or complex complaints require investigation. These can take a longer time to resolve. If this happens, you should be informed of the progress and the result of your complaint by phone or in writing at regular intervals until the matter is resolved.

If you have not heard from the person handling the complaint within a reasonable time, call to ask them what is happening.

What are the possible results?

1. The complaint is upheld and one or more of the following actions may be offered to you:

- action to fix or improve the situation
- an apology
- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again
- an undertaking to review the department's policies in light of the complaint.

2. Your complaint is not upheld. The reasons for this should be given to you clearly.

What if I am not happy with the result?

If you are not happy with the result, you may ask for a review of your complaint by contacting the school education director or the section of the department that assessed your complaint.

You can get the name and number from the administrative officer at your school or the department's switchboard on telephone number 02 9561 8000.

What if I am still not satisfied with the outcome?

If you feel that you haven't been treated fairly or that the result is unreasonable, you may wish to seek a review from an independent organisation. External bodies that may be able to assist include:

NSW Ombudsman

Ph: 02 9286 1000

www.ombo.nsw.gov.au

Anti-Discrimination Board of NSW

Ph: 02 9268 5555

www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/ADB