

Darlingia Forest School

Complaints Handling Policy & Procedure

Purpose:	The purpose of this policy is to make sure that student, parent and employee complaints and disputes are dealt with in a responsive, efficient, effective and fair way.		
Scope:	Students, parents and all employees, as well as contractors, volunteers and people undertaking work experience or vocational placements.		
Status:	APPROVED	Supersedes: Previous	
Authorised by:	Board Chair	Date of Authorisation: July 2023	
References:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Regulations 2017• Australian Education Regulations 2013• 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)• DFS Work Health and Safety Policy• DFS Disability Policy & Procedure• DFS Privacy Policy• DFS Conflict of Interest (Board) Policy		
Policy Owner:	School Board	Next Review Date:	July 2024

Policy Statement

Darlingia Forest School is committed to ensuring that student, parent and employee complaints are dealt with in a responsive, efficient, and effective and fair way. Darlingia views complaints as part of an important feedback, accountability, and improvement process.

Darlingia acknowledges the right of students, parents and employees to complain when dissatisfied with an action, inaction or decision of the school and the school encourages constructive criticism and complaints. Darlingia recognises that time spent on handling complaints can be an investment in better service to students, parents and employees.

Darlingia encourage students, parents and employees to lodge promptly any concerns regarding sexual harassment, child protection, discrimination, workplace bullying and privacy breaches as well as more general complaints. The table below outlines what kinds of complaints will be dealt with within the scope of this policy, and what will be dealt with under the scope of other policies.

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

Complaints Handling Principles

Darlingia is committed to managing complaints according to the following principles, and is responsible for ensuring their implementation as far as reasonably practicable:

- Darlingia will determine the appropriate person to deal with the complaint in the first instance.
- Darlingia encourages students, parents and employees to contribute to a healthy school culture where complaints are resolved with as little formality, disruption, and disputation as possible.
- Complaints will be taken seriously, and addressed as promptly and efficiently as possible, and within a timeframe that is agreeable to all parties involved.
- Anonymous complaints will be treated on their merits. Complaints will be dealt with fairly and objectively and in a timely manner.
- Appropriate remedies will be offered and implemented, including mediation, negotiation, and informal resolution as optional alternatives.
- When resolving complaints, everyone has rights and responsibilities that must be balanced, including the right to natural justice/procedural fairness wherever practicable, and the right of interested parties of the complaint to be heard. This means that the principles of this policy, and the complaints procedure itself will be applied equitably and fairly as outlined below, regardless of who makes a complaint, and the nature of the complaint. As part of this, when resolving complaints, conflicts of interest will be managed appropriately, as outlined in the table below, and in reference to the School's Conflict of Interest (Board) Policy.
- When resolving complaints, all parties should be calm, courteous, honest and sincere; avoid judgement and blame; value differences and respect each other's point of view; and acknowledge that the common goal is to achieve an outcome acceptable to everyone involved.
- Confidentiality and privacy will be maintained as much as possible, in accordance with legislative requirements.
- Darlingia will give reasonable progress updates to all parties involved.
- All parties to the complaints will be appropriately supported, and complainants, respondents and people associated with them will not be victimised as a result of lodging the complaints and they will not suffer any other reprisals.
- Darlingia will provide a review pathway for parties to the complaint if warranted.
- Darlingia will ensure all employees are trained in how to resolve or escalate complaints according to this policy and procedure.
- The school will keep records of complaints, including discussions and actions, in an 'Incidents & Complaints Register', which will be reviewed quarterly.
- Darlingia will ensure this policy is appropriately communicated to students, parents and employees by making it available to all on the school website and at the school's reception, and referencing it at key junctions, such as student enrolment and staff induction.
- The Teaching-Principal will report to the School Board any claims for legal redress, or complaints that could potentially result in the Board being found as unsuitable to be the school's Governing Body, or result in the School losing its accreditation.
- The school's insurer will be informed if a complaint could be connected to an insured risk.

Employee Responsibilities

When receiving a verbal or written complaint, employees should act in accordance with the school's Complaints Handling Policy and procedures by doing the following:

1. (If the complaint is written) respond within 2 working days of initially receiving the complaint;
2. Remain calm, respectful, helpful, and positive;

3. Clarify the issues raised to make sure you understand what the complainant is telling you;
4. Empathise and acknowledge the complainant's feelings;
5. Ask what the complainant wants to happen as a result of the complaint;
6. Resolve the complaint if possible, or
7. Inform the party lodging the complaint of how complaints can be lodged formally, when they should be lodged and what information is required, and tell the complainant that you will pass their complaint on to the appropriate person - ask them to put the complaint in writing if appropriate;
8. Give the complainant a copy of this document to help them lodge their complaint, and provide the complainant with information about any support or assistance available to assist them in lodging their complaint ;
9. Thank the complainant for their feedback; and
10. Forward complaints to the Teaching Principal or Board of Directors, if appropriate, who will then lodge the complaint in the 'Incidents and Complaints Register' within 2 working days.
11. While doing all of the above, maintain confidentiality, keep appropriate records, and not victimise or act in reprisal against the complainant, respondent or any person associated with them.

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 procedures
- 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 in a calm and courteous manner
- act in a 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.

Incidents and Complaints Register

All concerns, complaints, and grievances, or formal, written notices of concerns, complaints, and grievances about the School to other agencies, will be entered into the School's 'Incidents and Complaints Register', to enable the School's Administration to effectively monitor and track the progression of the said concerns, complaints, and grievances. This may result in the concerns, complaints, and grievances being included in the School's 'Strategic Intentions and Action Plan'.

Complaints within the Scope of this Policy and Designation of Responsibilities

About / Issue	Who to contact	How
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Friendship issues Student/parent communication 	School Support Worker or the relevant Teacher	By email: admin@darlingia.org By phone: 0481 430 585
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Issues related to classroom activities, learning programs, assessment and reporting of student learning 	The relevant Teacher	Or in-person: Make an appointment to ensure there is enough time and a quiet location available to talk about the issue.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Issues related to friendship issues, if there is a conflict of interest with the relevant staff member Student/parent communication, if there is a conflict of interest with the relevant staff member or if unresolved with the relevant staff member Issues related to learning programs, assessment and reporting of student learning, if unresolved with the relevant teacher Issues related to communication with students or parents or between employees, if unresolved with the relevant staff member. Complex students issues and student welfare Harassment and discrimination, and privacy breaches School policy, management, and administration, including issues related to school fees and enrolment The school, its employees or students having done something wrong generally The school, its employees or students having failed to do something they should have done generally The school, its employees or students having acted unfairly or impolitely Issues of student or employee behaviour that are contrary to their relevant Staff Code of Conduct 	Teaching Principal	Appointments with staff are available between 2:30PM-3:30PM, Monday-Friday.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching principal, including in relation to any of the above issues that there may be a risk, whether perceived, actual, or potential of a conflict of interest impeding the teaching principal's ability to resolve the complaint in a fair manner, in relation to both procedural fairness, and fairness of resolution. Note: For impartiality, ideally the Board Chairperson is not a parent of an enrolled student, or a paid employee of the School, as per the School's Conflict of Interest (Board) Policy. 	Contact the Chairperson of the Board of Directors in writing: The Chairperson, Darlingia Forest School, 89 Mourilyan Road, Innisfail, QLD, 4860	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Board of Directors 	Contact the Non-State Schools Accreditation Board: http://nssab.qld.edu.au/Complaints/index.php	

Complaints outside the Scope of this Policy

Nature of the Complaint	Policy / Who to Contact
Student bullying complaints and discipline matters, including suspension or expulsion.	Teaching-Principal
Employee workplace bullying, and harassment, including sexual harassment.	Teaching-Principal, or if there is a conflict of interest or they are uncomfortable doing so, the Board of Directors or the Chairperson
Employee complaints related to other aspects of their employment	Teaching-Principal, or if there is a conflict of interest or they are uncomfortable doing so, the Board of Directors or the Chairperson
Student or employee violence or criminal matters.	Teaching-Principal will involve the Police as appropriate
Child protection concerns and reports, including risk of harm or abuse.	Child Protection Risk Management Policy
Formal legal proceedings.	Board of Directors

Complaint Procedure Level One

The first step is to ***go and speak informally to the person with whom you have an issue, as soon as possible***; Many complaints can be resolved by communicating openly, honestly and in a non-threatening manner and environment, while also providing information, an explanation, an apology, and/or recognition of the effect the situation has had on the person.

Complaint Procedure Level Two

If the issue cannot be resolved, or you are uncomfortable taking the complaint to the person concerned, ***please send your complaint to us in writing***. When receiving a written complaint, the Teaching Principal and/or Board-Member should follow the steps in 'Level One' (if appropriate). Assurances from a more senior staff member or entity may improve the situation and prevent further escalation.

Otherwise, an appropriate person will conduct an investigation:

- Reviewing any relevant documents (e.g. injury, incident, or behaviour reports);
- Reading and referencing any relevant policies, procedures, legislation, or appropriate peak-bodies; and
- Meeting with relevant parties to confirm events.
- A suitable person **must** be present as an independent witness during meetings. For a child that should be their parents if possible. For an employee that may be a union delegate.

Based-on the information gathered, the investigating person will make a decision on the complaint and write to the complainant within a reasonable timeframe. The letter/email will include a record of the complaint and investigation, details of the actions or strategies or resolutions taken in response to the complaint, and the following attachments:

- Relevant incident or behaviour reports; and
- Minutes/notes of meetings with parties involved.

Complaint Procedure Level Three

If the issue is still not resolved, or you would like an appeal of a decision, the Teaching Principal will, with your written permission, then **take the matter to the next Board Meeting** to be discussed, and will invite you to come along if appropriate. The Board of Directors will be notified as soon as possible with all relevant information compiled, including details of all actions taken and results so far. The Board will review all of the information provided, and may choose to conduct further investigations of their own. Any actions or decisions arising from the meeting should be recorded, including any agreed outcomes, a time-frame in which the resolution is to be achieved, and actions to review the resolution if necessary. The minutes of the meeting should be signed by all parties involved.

Complaint Procedure Beyond School Level

If you still feel your issues have not been satisfactorily addressed, you can advise the Board of Directors and they will take the matter to a higher body, such as the Non-State Schools Accreditation Board, and request unbiased assistance which could mean mediation from an impartial third-party or legal proceedings. This step should be viewed as the last resort, *once all the previous stages have been undertaken*.