

Disputes and Complaints

Kulkarriya Community School is a community directed school where the wider community has a large say in the direction and priorities of the school whilst also sharing responsibility for the education of the children within the context of our community. It is important that teaching staff keep an open mind and recognise that, in many ways, their cultural and personal backgrounds are very different to that of almost everyone else in the wider community. These differences are most apparent when it comes to modes of communication, particularly between kartiya (non-Indigenous) staff and community members. Our school is committed to developing and maintaining a culture of listening and acknowledging differing opinions. This is achieved through the building of positive relationships, respecting each other's rights and seeking to fulfil our individual responsibilities within the school context. In light of this commitment, it is important to recognise that all stakeholders (parents/guardians, students, members of the community and staff) are all able to lodge complaints about matters concerning the school.

The principles which govern the way these are dealt with are as follows:

1. People are entitled to raise concerns and complaints
2. All efforts are made to resolve disputes at a school level
3. Natural justice requires that all parties have the opportunity to be heard
4. Appropriate confidentiality is respected by all parties
5. Prompt written acknowledgement of a complaint will be made
6. Action will be taken within a stated timeline
7. Formal examination and investigation of the complaint will be made by an authorised person
8. Substance of the complaint will be provided to the subject of the complaint
9. Action being taken communicated to the complainant
10. Clear record kept of the complaint, the action taken and the outcome
11. Referral, where necessary, will be made to an independent arbiter for the successful resolution of the complaint
12. A written report will be given to the complainant

The school will also make this policy available at all times to parents, guardians and careers, students and staff, either through the school website, the school handbook or from the school office. School staff members will be made aware of this policy at staff induction to ensure that they know how to handle complaints if they occur.

Parental complaints

The staff and School Committee at Kulkarriya Community School recognise that it is important for parents and guardians to feel comfortable to voice their complaints and concerns openly. To do this, they must feel that their complaints and concerns will be received positively and according to the school policy. In our community, it is also important that parents are able to talk to someone who they know and trust. The creation and use of an effective complaints procedure can help defuse problems and can provide the school with helpful information. Complaints can also be used as constructive suggestions which can help improve standards and may prevent further complaints.

What constitutes a parental complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem. A complaint may be made if a parent thinks that the school has, for example,

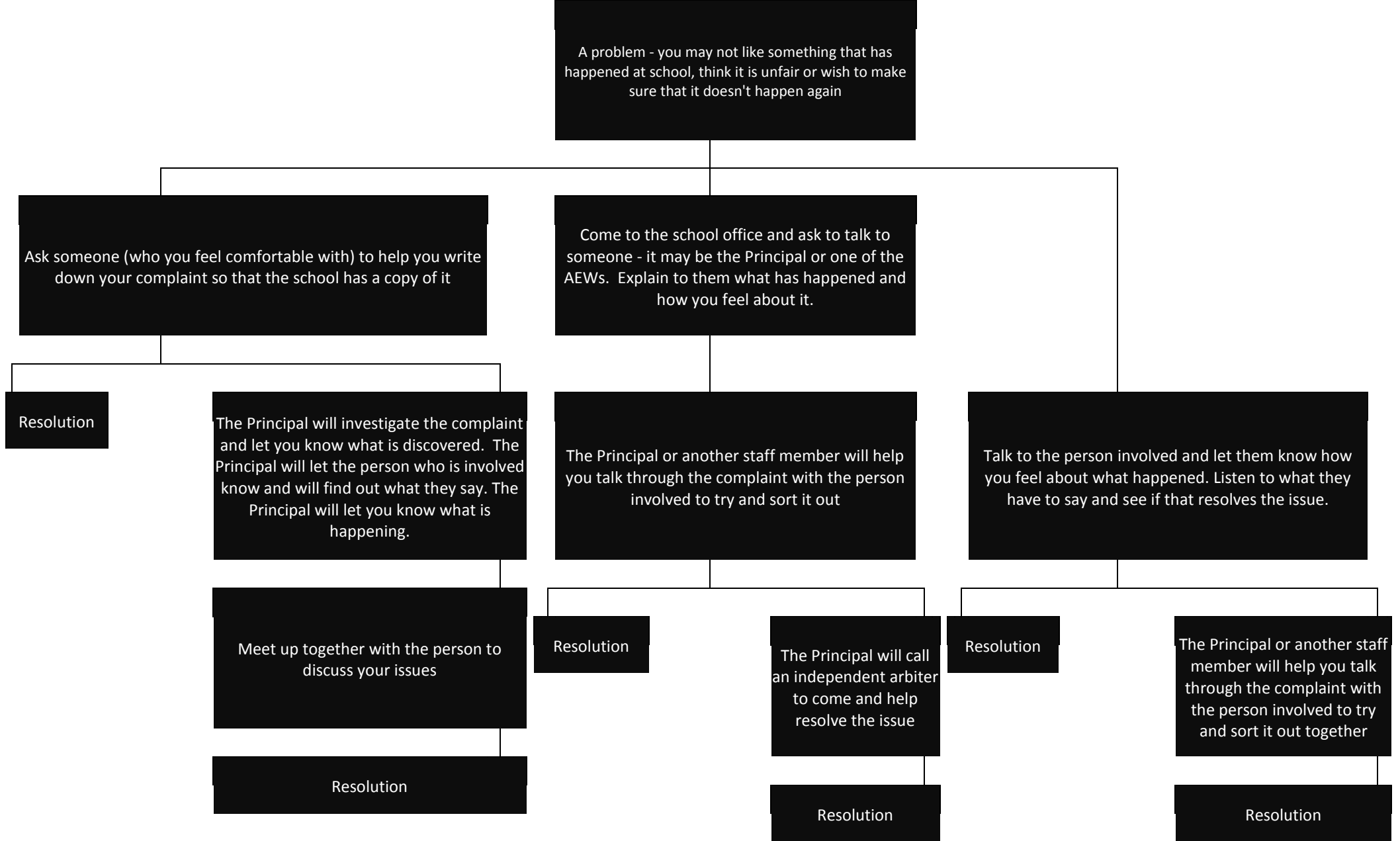
- Done something wrong
- Failed to do something that it should have done
- Acted unfairly or impolitely

Lines of approach

Staff at Kulkarriya Community School are advised to take complaints from parents and guardians to the school principal or the principal's delegate. If a teacher wishes to write a written response to a complaint, he or she is advised to show this response to the principal (or delegate) before doing so thus the principal can sign it before it leaves the school. This shows the parent or guardian that the response from the teacher has the support of the school principal.

Reducing anxiety

Parents and guardians may feel anxious about lodging a complaint, whether it be informal or formal. This is especially so in our community context where people are sometimes overwhelmed and intimidated by the school and its staff. We can help reduce this anxiety by explaining the procedure of our complaints policy. Staff must make it clear that parents have plenty of time to explain what is troubling them. It should also be made clear that they may seek assistance from a person of their choice if they want someone to help put their complaint in writing or if they want someone to accompany them to talk about the complaint. If the complaint cannot be dealt with immediately, parents should be given an indication of how long the process may take. The following flowchart can assist with explaining the process to parents.



Recording

The school needs to keep an effective log of complaints and other parental concerns because

- It may become the cause of legal action in the future
- Patterns in the record may indicate a need for action
- The Principal needs to check the log and report to the School Committee about it.

The format of the log is:-

Date	Name of Parent	Name of student	Issue	Location of detailed file	Member of Staff Handling	Brief statement of outcome
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The log is kept in the school office. Confidential files on these matters will be kept together in a secure location and cross referenced with other files as necessary.

Confidentiality

Is it essential that parents and guardians feel confident that any complaint that they raise with the school will be treated with confidentiality and that the student will not suffer because of the complaint. In some cases it may be possible to deal with a problem without naming individuals. Staff members should always be told about complaints that have the potential to damage their reputation. The principal must ensure that any complaint against a staff member is treated with utmost confidentiality.

Resolution

Sometimes, the very acknowledgement of an issue by a school brings relief to parents. Satisfaction may also come from knowing the following:

- Changes have been made and matters will be very different in the future
- The school is now aware of a possible problem
- The school considered their concern seriously
- An apology has been made.