



## **POLICY AND GUIDELINES**

### **GRIEVANCES POLICY**

*A guide for parents about raising a concern or complaint*

#### **Introduction**

At Huntingtower, we believe that the School's relationship with a student and the student's parents is a very important part of ensuring that students studying at the School are happy, safe, secure and open to learning.

We recognise that students, parents and staff need to work closely together to provide the best educational opportunities and care for students. We encourage parents to discuss their child's progress with School staff, and to let us know if they have any concerns so that we might work together to resolve these as promptly and effectively as we can.

#### **Purpose**

This policy provides clear and transparent information to students, parents, the community and staff about how concerns and complaints by parents and students can be made, will be managed, and will be resolved.

The policy provides a framework for dealing with concerns and complaints that involves a four-step process, namely:

Stage 1 – Parents raising a concern

Stage 2 – Parents making a complaint to the Principal

Stage 3 – Parents requesting a review by the Board

Stage 4 – Parents making a complaint externally

The emphasis of the framework is on the prompt resolution of concerns, ideally without there being a need for a complaint to be made.

Timeframes listed in this policy are only a guide and can vary due to the nature of the concern or complaint and surrounding circumstances. Where timeframes set out in this policy cannot be met, the School will endeavour to notify the affected parties of this as soon as practicable.

## **Guiding principles**

The School believes that staff, parents and students are committed to working closely together to provide the best educational opportunities for every child and young person studying at the School. The School is committed to the development of professional, trusting and cooperative relationships between the School, students and parents.

The School believes that the raising of concerns and complaints is an important way in which parents and students can provide the School with feedback to enable future improvements. The School will therefore seek to identify both the specific and (where applicable) systemic issues raised by a concern or complaint.

The School is committed to student safety and has a zero tolerance of child abuse. Concerns and complaints that may give rise to child abuse or reportable conduct issues will be managed in accordance with the School's Student Wellbeing Policy.

Confidentiality will be adhered to throughout any concern or complaint resolution process. This means that the concern or complaint will only be discussed with those people directly involved in the resolution process.

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

When raising a concern or complaint with the School, parents (and their child studying at the School) can expect to:

- Be treated with respect and courtesy
- Have their concerns and complaints taken seriously, considered impartially, and dealt with on their merits (or the merits of the case)
- Have a concern or complaint dealt with in a confidential and timely manner
- Have access to appropriate and easily understandable information regarding the complaint resolution process being followed
- Be kept informed of the progress and outcome of their concern or complaint
- Not be victimised, or subjected to reprisal, for raising concerns or complaints in good faith

In return, the School expects that parents and students will:

- Treat others (including School staff) with respect and courtesy
- Raise concerns as soon as possible after the event giving rise to the concern has occurred
- Provide complete and factual information about the concern or complaint
- Ask for assistance or further information as needed
- Act in good faith to achieve a reasonable outcome

In raising a concern, the first point of contact should be to the:

1. Mentor (Senior School) or Classroom teacher (Junior School)
2. Year Level Coordinator
3. Head of Middle School or Vice Principal (Students & Activities)
4. Principal

## Concern/Complaint resolution framework

### Stage 1 – Raise the concern

Huntingtower should always be your first point of contact when you have a concern about your child's education and/or wellbeing. The School needs to know if you have any concerns about your child's education. Teaching and learning works best when parents and teachers communicate with each other directly, and work together to solve any issues or problems.

Parents should take into account the following when raising a concern:

- Try to identify the issue or problem clearly before contacting the School, as well as the outcome you are realistically seeking to achieve (while being open to other outcomes and solutions).
- Decide whether the issue or problem is in the nature of an enquiry, concern or grievance. This will help in finding a solution.
- If there is more than one issue or problem, prepare a list so that you are properly prepared.
- Make an appointment to meet with your child's Mentor/Class teacher or other relevant staff member (counsellor, year level coordinator) to discuss the concern - the best way to do this is to contact the school office to arrange a mutually convenient time for a telephone call or meeting.

The School's emphasis at this stage will be on understanding the concern being raised, and ideally seeking agreement on solutions. Where agreement is not possible, the School staff member dealing with the concern will make a decision that aligns with the School's policies and obligations.

### Stage 2 – Make a complaint

If you are not satisfied with the way your concern has been dealt with by a School staff member, you may choose to make a complaint to the Principal. If the complaint concerns the Principal, the complaint should be made to the Board (addressed to the Chair).

You may write to the Principal (who will then acknowledge receipt of the complaint as soon as practical, usually within *three business days*), or telephone the School to make a time to meet. If you arrange to meet, you may choose 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.

Complaints should ordinarily be made within one month of the related concern being raised with the School.

The stage enables the Principal or Board (as applicable) to resolve your complaint by:

- Clarifying the complaint, and the steps taken by the School to deal with the initial concern
- Identifying whether the complaint raises an issue regarding a breach of the School's policies
- Communicating with the relevant parent(s) and staff member(s) 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 principles.

The Principal or Board (as applicable) may seek the assistance of a third party, including an independent mediator or investigator, to assist with this stage. The Principal may also delegate the management of the complaint to another senior staff member where the Principal considers it appropriate to do so.

The School will aim to resolve complaints within *15 business days* where possible.

### **Stage 3 – Requesting a review**

If you are not satisfied that your complaint has been adequately resolved by the Principal, you may request a review. Requests for review should be made to the Board (and addressed to the Chair).

Requests must be made in writing within (14) days of a decision being made. The grounds for the review, and in particular any concerns with the way the relevant complaint was dealt with, should be clearly identified.

The Board may delegate all or parts of their respective roles during this review process, including to a committee or independent investigator, however any ultimate decision will still be made by the Board. For the avoidance of doubt, the Board will not delegate to the Principal a review of a decision he or she has already made.

The School will aim to resolve requests for review within *45 business days* where possible.

Please note that reviews by the Board are final.

### **Stage 4 – External complaints**

The School acknowledges that in some cases parents may remain dissatisfied with the outcome of certain complaints and requests for review.

If you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of a request for review, you may choose to contact Independent Schools Victoria (**ISV**) or the Victorian Registrations & Qualifications Authority (**VRQA**).

### **Withdrawal of a complaint**

A complaint can be withdrawn by a parent at any stage during the processes outlined in this policy. A written complaint should preferably be retracted in writing, however a signed and dated notation on the original written complaint that it has been withdrawn verbally can be made by the person at the School responsible for managing the complaint (being either the Principal or Board).

The School will notify affected parties if a complaint is withdrawn.

### **Anonymous concerns and complaints**

The School is committed to dealing with concerns and complaints in accordance with the processes outlined in this policy. The School respects that some people do not feel comfortable putting a name to their grievances, and will always investigate concerns and complaints relating to child abuse and reportable conduct to the fullest extent practicable. However, anonymity can make it difficult for the School to effectively resolve concerns and complaints (particularly where the School is being asked to accept an anonymous source's version of events) and is therefore not encouraged.

### **Vexatious and stale concerns and complaints**

The School does not tolerate vexatious concerns and complaints. Stale concerns and complaints that have been previously dealt with by the School will not be revisited in the absence of highly relevant new information coming to light.

### **Monitoring and review**

The School documents, records and monitors concerns and complaints, including:

- The action taken to resolve a concern or complaint, and the relevant outcomes
- Whether the concern or complaint raises a serious compliance issue.

Records will be kept, and the information analysed to assist the School in improving service quality and delivery.

### **Parent Communication**

This Policy is available to parents via the School's parent portal. In addition, relevant aspects of this Policy will be raised with students at meetings, highlighted in Bulletins and newsletters.

### **Communication**

This Policy is available to staff via the School's staff portal. In addition, relevant aspects of this Policy will be raised at staff meetings.

### **Evaluation**

The Principal is primarily responsible for monitoring Huntingtower's overall compliance with this Policy, which will be reviewed as part of Huntingtower's policy review cycle (and otherwise as and when required).

### **Authorisation**

This policy was authorised by the Principal on 20 November 2018.

Reviewed September 2015, May 2016, October 2018, October 2019, September 2020

Date of next review October 2021