Complaints Handling Policy



Australian Technology & Agricultural College

Complaints Handling Policy

Purpose:	The purpose of this policy is to provide written processes about receiving, assessing, investigating and otherwise dealing with complaints.[1]	
Scope:	Any person directly affected by the subject of a complaint. Examples may include staff, students or a student's parent or guardian, contractors, or community members.	
Status:	Approved	**Supersedes:** Complaints handling policy v1
Authorised by:	Board Chair	**Date of Authorisation:** 24 Nov 2026
References:	• *Child Safe Organisations Act 2024* (Qld) • *Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Regulation 2017* (Qld) • *Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000* and National Code • Standards Australia, AS 10002:2022 Guidelines for complaint management in organizations (ISO 10002:2018 NEQ) • ATAC Reporting Concerns of Harm and Abuse Policy • ATAC Student Safety and Wellbeing Policy • ATAC Complaints Handling Procedure • ATAC Work Health and Safety Policy	
Review Cycle:	Annually	**Next Review Date:** Nov 27
Policy Owner:	School Governing Body	

[1] *Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Regulations 2017*, s.7

Definitions

Complainant	The person, organisation or their representative making a complaint.[2]
Complaint	An expression of dissatisfaction made to or about the school, related to the school's services, staff or the handling of a complaint, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required.[3]
Formal Complaint	A complaint about a matter that is serious, complex or may pose a threat to the health and safety of any person. Examples include serious allegations or breaches of policy, complaints against a senior staff member, including the principal or an informal complaint that could not be resolved informally or allegations of reportable conduct involving a worker. Assessment of the complaint is required by Board Chair.
Informal Complaint	A complaint about a matter that is likely to be simple, straight forward, easily manageable, or minor, where a simple or quick resolution is appropriate such as discussion of the matter with a relevant staff member.
Respondent	The person who is referred to in a complaint by a complainant as the person responsible for their concerns or who can best respond to their concern.
Worker	Has the same meaning as section 8 of the *Child Safe Organisations Act* 2024. A worker is a person who performs work of any kind for the school, including staff, volunteers, contractors, subcontractors, consultants, labour-hire workers, governing body members, and religious leaders.

[2] Standards Australia, AS 1002:2022 Guidelines for complaint management in organizations (ISO 10002:2018, NEQ), s.4.2

[3] Standards Australia, AS 1002:2022 Guidelines for complaint management in organizations (ISO 10002:2018, NEQ), s.4.3

Policy Statement

ATAC acknowledges the right of students, parents/guardians, staff and others to complain when dissatisfied with the school's services, including an action, inaction or decision of the school. The school encourages constructive criticism and complaints. ATAC is committed to ensuring that complaints received are handled in a responsive, efficient, consistent, effective, transparent and fair way.

ATAC will ensure staff can recognise, receive, and appropriately refer complaints to the informal or formal complaints procedure.

ATAC recognises that time spent on handling complaints can be an investment in better service to students and parents/guardians and a better culture for staff, and views complaints as part of an important feedback and accountability process.

ATAC promotes a safe, inclusive and culturally responsive environment for all students, ensuring their safety and wellbeing are prioritised. ATAC is committed to students exercising their right to speak up and participate in school processes and decisions that affect them.

ATAC recognises that some complaints may raise issues of child protection or reportable conduct involving workers. These matters will be managed in accordance with relevant legislation and the school's Reporting Concerns of Harm and Abuse Policy and Student Safety and Wellbeing Policy, including compliance with the *Reportable Conduct Scheme*.

Complaints Handling Principles

ATAC will manage complaints according to the following (which include principles of procedural fairness):

- complaints will be taken seriously, dealt with fairly and objectively, without judgement and addressed in a reasonable timeframe
- complaints should be resolved with as little formality and disruption as possible, having regard to the nature of the complaint
- interested parties to the complaint (for example, the complaint and any respondent) will be heard and/or may provide relevant information in relation to the complaint
- confidentiality and privacy will be maintained as much as possible
- a child-centred approach will be maintained, and all complaints will be managed in a manner that prioritises the student's safety, wellbeing, and voice
- a trauma-informed and culturally safe approach to managing complaints will be prioritised
- the complainant and any respondent will be offered support as appropriate
- victimising behaviour towards a complainant, respondent or other people associated with the complaint, will not be tolerated
- complainants that lodge a complaint on reasonable grounds will not suffer any other reprisals on the basis of the lodging the complaint.

Complaints that may be Resolved under this Policy

ATAC encourages anyone who feels impacted by an issue involving the school to file a complaint. Complaints can address matters such as:

- the school, its staff or students having done something wrong
- the school, its staff or students having failed to do something they should have done
- the school, its staff or students having acted unfairly or impolitely
- issues of student or staff behaviour that are contrary to the code of conduct, including inappropriate staff conduct as reported by a student.[4]
- issues related to learning programs, assessment and reporting of student learning
- issues related to communication with students or parents or between staff
- issues related to school fees and payments
- general administrative issues
- issues relating to non-compliance with a process outlined in school policies or procedures, for example the Reporting Concerns of Harm and Abuse Policy, discrimination policies, or privacy policy. [5]

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

Issues Outside this Policy

The following matters are outside the scope of this policy and should be managed as follows:

- Child protection concerns including allegations of sexual abuse, likely sexual abuse or harm to children should be dealt in accordance with the school's Reporting Concerns of Harm and Abuse Policy.
- Allegations that may constitute *reportable conduct* involving a worker (as defined under the *Child Safe Organisations Act 2024* (Qld*)*) will not be managed solely under this policy and must be managed in accordance with the school's Reporting Concerns of Harm and Abuse Policy or and the school's obligations under the *Reportable Conduct Scheme*, including notification to the Queensland Family and Child Commission within legislated timeframes.
- Student bullying complaints should be dealt with under ATAC's Student Anti-Bullying Policy.
- Student discipline matters, including matters involving suspension or expulsion, should be dealt with under the school's Behaviour Management Policy.
- Student or staff violence or criminal matters should be directed to [include role equivalent to Principal i.e. Principal, CEO, Headmaster] who will involve the Police as appropriate.
- Disputes relating to a staff member's employment should be directed to their manager and dealt with under the enterprise agreement and/or employment law.

  This does not include disputes about work health and safety matters or complaints about relevant unlawful conduct under the school's Sexual Harassment Policy, which may be dealt with under the school's Complaints Handling Policy.
- Disputes between board members, between ATAC and board members or between ATAC members should be dealt with in accordance with the relevant document e.g. Constitution, Board Charter or other policy.

[4] Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Regulation 2017 s.16(2)(a)
[5] Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Regulation 2017 s.16(5)

- Formal legal proceedings should be managed as appropriate in the circumstances.
- Complaints relating to the education and training services provided by the school to an overseas student should be dealt with in accordance with the *Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000* and National Code and the school's Overseas Student's Complaints and Appeals Policy and Process.

Responsibilities

School

The school has the following roles and responsibilities:

- develop, implement, promote and act in accordance with the school's Complaints Handling Policy
- appropriately communicate the school's Complaints Handling Policy to students, parents and staff
- ensure that the Complaints Handling Policy and processes are readily accessible by staff, students and parents
- upon receipt of a complaint, manage the complaint in accordance with the Complaints Handling Policy
- ensure that appropriate support is made available to all parties to a complaint
- take appropriate action to prevent victimisation or action in reprisal against the complainant, respondent or any person associated with them
- appropriately implement remedies
- appropriately train relevant staff
- keep records
- conduct a review/audit of the Complaints Register at regular intervals
- report to the school's insurer when relevant.

All Parties to a Dispute

The complainant and respondent both have the following roles and responsibilities:

- comply with the school's Complaints Handling Policy
- provide complete and factual information in a timely manner
- not provide deliberately false or misleading information
- not make frivolous or vexatious complaints or retaliatory complaints
- act in good faith and maintain a mutually beneficial relationship of trust and cooperation
- act in a calm, courteous and non-threatening manner
- acknowledge that the 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.

Staff Receiving and/or Managing Complaints

Staff receiving and/or managing complaints have the following roles and responsibilities:

- act in accordance with the school's Complaints Handling Policy
- refer the complainant to the school's Complaints Handling Policy and processes and provide additional information as necessary
- maintain confidentiality as far as possible
- keep appropriate records
- forward complaints to more senior staff, including the Principal, if the complaint cannot be resolved at the initial level or if it involves serious issues that require escalation
- identify and escalate matters that may involve child safety concerns or reportable conduct by a worker, in accordance with the school's Reporting Concerns of Harm and Abuse Policy
- not victimise or act in reprisal against the complainant, respondent or any person associated with them.

Implementation

ATAC is committed to raising awareness of the process for resolving complaints at the school, including by the development and implementation of this policy and via the clear support and promotion of the policy. The policy will be available for all to access via the website.

ATAC is also committed to regular (annual) training of staff on the implementation of this policy.

Complaint Register

ATAC will maintain a complaint register with details such as the date, source and description of complaints, the staff managing the complaint, the actions taken, outcome and the date the complaint was closed.

The complaint register will be stored securely.

All complaints shall be entered onto the complaint register as soon as practicable after the complaint is received. The complaint register will not contain complaints about the Principal. Records of complaints about the Principal will be maintained by the Board with access restricted to the Board.

To safeguard confidentiality and maintain the integrity of the complaint process, access to the entire complaint register will be limited to the Principal and the Principal's EA.

The Principal may authorise the sharing of specific, relevant entries from the complaint register with other designated staff members (such as the senior leadership team), provided measures are taken to protect the confidentiality of all parties involved, particularly ensuring that respondents to a complaint do not gain inappropriate access to information about the allegations against them.

Related Legislation, Policies & Other Resources

- *Australian Education Act 2013* (Cth)
- *Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986* (Cth)
- *Disability Services Act 2006* (Qld)
- *Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Act 2017* (Qld)
- *Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Regulation 2017* (Qld)
- *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006* (Qld)
- *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth)

Complaint Handling Procedure

[Delete Note]

Note: Consider also developing a child-friendly version/s of the below procedure that is age-appropriate, written in plain language and is accessible for students e.g. flow-charts, posters. You may consider more than one version if you are a P-12 school or have students with diverse needs.

Ensure all procedures include a process for raising allegations of reportable conduct about a worker with the school, and about the head of the entity with the Queensland Family and Child Commission.

[Insert your school's existing complaints handling procedure here and delete the procedure section below]

OR

[Delete Note}

Note: Adapt the procedure below for your school's policy, deleting or amending placeholder wording in blue as appropriate for your context.

1. Lodging a Complaint

a) Complaints can be lodged with the most appropriate staff member at the local level, for example, the initial contact point for many complaints is the student's relevant classroom teacher.
b) Complaints about the Principal must be lodged with the Board [include method for contact and relevant contact details e.g. email address]
c) Allegations of *reportable conduct* by the [include role title of Principal/Head of the Entity] can be lodged with the Board [include method for contact and relevant contact details e.g. email address]
d) In addition to 1.a) and c) allegations of reportable conduct by a worker or the [include role title of Principal/Head of the Entity] can be made directly to the Queensland Family and Child Commission.
e) Complaints can be lodged through various methods, including:
[Amend methods as appropriate for school context]
    i. Phone
    ii. Email
    iii. In-person (by appointment)
f) If the complainant is unsure where to direct their complaint, they can contact the [include relevant contact details e.g. school administration office] for guidance.
g) If the complainant is uncomfortable directing the complaint to the most appropriate member at the local level, or wants to make a formal complaint, they can submit a complaint by:
[Amend as appropriate]
    i. Completing the online complaint form (available on the school website)
    ii. Using the anonymous reporting system
    iii. Other method e.g. report to member of the executive

h) Where an anonymous complaint is lodged, the school will follow the complaints handling policy, when there is sufficient information to do so.

2. Acknowledgement, Assessment and Referral

The staff member receiving the complaint will:

a) acknowledge the complaint within two (2) Business days, outlining the next steps and where possible the estimated timeframes.
b) assess the complaint, using the definitions of informal and formal complaints in this policy, and refer the complaint to the informal or formal complaints process.
c) as part of the assessment, the staff member must consider whether the complaint raises a potential reportable conduct allegation involving a worker.
d) where this threshold may be met, the matter must be immediately escalated and managed under the school's Reporting Concerns of Harm and Abuse Policy, including consideration of notification obligations to the Queensland Family and Child Commission.

3. Registration and Support

a) The recipient of the complaint will promptly enter it onto the complaints register, regardless of whether it proceeds through the informal or formal process.
b) The recipient of the complaint will offer support to the complainant as appropriate, which may include assistance with completing forms or understanding procedures.

If a student is a complainant, respondent or victim, or the child of a complainant, respondent or victim of a matter being managed through this policy, the school may offer the student support where appropriate e.g. discussing suitable adjustments with parents/caregivers.

4. Informal Complaints Handling Process

a) The informal process is designed to resolve issues promptly and collaboratively at the local level.
b) It may involve constructive discussion and negotiation between the complainant and the relevant staff member(s).
c) If the complaint cannot be resolved informally, it will be escalated to the formal process.

5. Formal Complaints Handling Process

a) The formal process begins with the assessment of the complaint by a designated staff member (e.g., a member of the senior leadership team or the board chair for complaints against the principal)
b) The staff member may gather additional information through investigation, interviews, or evidence review. The staff member may consult with appropriate members of the student's or the family's community
c) The staff member will determine appropriate action, which may include:
    i. Mediation
    ii. Disciplinary measures
    iii. Implementation of policy changes
    iv. Referral to external agencies (e.g., police)
    v. Provision of written updates to the complainant throughout the process
    vi. Other actions the Principal determine as appropriate in the circumstances.

6. Complaint Closure

a) The complaint register will be updated with the date the complaint is closed and a brief summary of the outcome.
b) The complainant will receive written notification of the outcome and any actions taken where appropriate.

7. Appeals Process

a) Complainants may appeal the outcome of a complaint by writing to:
    i. the Principal (for complaints not previously managed by the Principal,)
    ii. the Board Chair (for complaints previously managed by the Principal, or complaints about the Principal).