



COMPLAINTS POLICY

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that student, parent and employee complaints and disputes are dealt with in a responsive, efficient, effective and fair way.

Scope

Students, parents and employees, including full-time, part-time, permanent, fixed-term and casual employees, as well as contractors, volunteers and people undertaking work experience or vocational placements.

Policy Statement

Montessori Noosa is committed to ensuring that student, parent and employee complaints are dealt with in a responsive, efficient, and effective and fair way.

Montessori Noosa views complaints as part of an important feedback and accountability process.

Montessori Noosa 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.

Montessori Noosa recognises that time spent on handling complaints can be an investment in better service to students, parents and employees.

Complaints that may be Resolved under this Policy

Montessori Noosa 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 that include areas such as:

- the school, its employees or students having done something wrong

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- the school, its employees or students having failed to do something they should have done
- the school, its employees or students having acted unfairly or impolitely
- issues of student or employee behaviour that are contrary to their relevant
- issues related to learning programs, assessment and reporting of student learning
- issues related to communication with students or parents or between employees
- issues related to school fees and payments
- general administrative issues.

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 or risks of harm to children should be dealt with in accordance with the law and the school's Child Protection Policy.
- Student bullying complaints should be dealt with under the MN Student Bullying Policy.
- Student discipline matters, including matters involving suspension or expulsion, should be dealt with under the MN Discipline Policy, with reference to enrolment contract sign by parents on admission to the school.
- Employee complaints related to their employment should be directed to their supervisor.
- Student or employee violence or criminal matters should be directed to the Principal who will involve the Police as appropriate.
- Formal legal proceedings.

Complaints Handling Principles

Montessori Noosa is committed to managing complaints according to the following principles:

- complaints will be resolved with as little formality and disruption as possible
- complaints will be taken seriously
- anonymous complaints will be treated on their merits complaints will be dealt with fairly and objectively and in a timely manner
- Montessori Noosa will determine the appropriate person to deal with the complaint in the first instance. Complaints should be resolved with as little formality and disputation as possible
- mediation, negotiation and informal resolution are optional alternatives
- procedural fairness will be ensured wherever practicable, including the right of interested parties to the complaint to be heard
- confidentiality and privacy will be maintained as much as possible
- all parties to the complaints will be appropriately supported
- Montessori Noosa will give reasonable progress updates
- appropriate remedies will be offered and implemented
- provide a review pathway for parties to the complaint if warranted
- 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
- the school will keep records of complaints
- the school's insurer will be informed if a complaint could be connected to an insured risk.

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Responsibilities

School

The school has the following role and responsibilities:

- develop, implement, promote and act in accordance with the school's Complaints Handling Policy and procedures
- appropriately communicate the school's Complaints Handling Policy and procedures to students, parents and employees
- ensure that the Complaints Handling procedures are readily accessible by staff, students and parents
- upon receipt of a complaint, manage the complaint in accordance with the Complaints Handling procedures
- ensure that appropriate support is provided 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 employees
- keep records
- conduct a review/audit of the Complaints Register from time to time
- monitor and report to the governing body on complaints
- report to the school's insurer when that is relevant
- refer to the school's governing body immediately any claim for legal redress.

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

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- 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.

Employees Receiving Complaints

Employees receiving complaints have the following role and responsibilities:

- act in accordance with the school's Complaints Handling Policy and procedures
- inform the party lodging the complaint of how complaints can be lodged, when they should be lodged and what information is required
- provide the complainant with information about any support or assistance available to assist them in lodging their complaint
- provide the complainant with a copy of the school's Complaints Handling Policy and procedures
- maintain confidentiality
- keep appropriate records
- to forward complaints to more senior employees, including the Principal, as appropriate
- not victimise or act in reprisal against the complainant, respondent or any person associated with them.

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Implementation

Montessori Noosa is committed to raising awareness of the process for resolving complaints at the school, including by the development and implementation of this policy and related procedures, and via the clear support and promotion of the policy and procedures.

Montessori Noosa will keep appropriate records of complaints, will monitor complaints and their resolution and will report on a high-level basis to the school Board on complaint handling at the school.

Montessori Noosa will act to encourage students, parents and employees to contribute to a healthy school culture where complaints are resolved with as little formality and disruption as possible.

THE PROCESS

Step 1 – Speak to the staff member directly concerned

This is the preferred resolution of any issues relating to procedures, programmes, curriculum, children or staff. It is always to be used in the first instance and is sufficient where the issue can be raised between parent/guardian, staff member and student (if appropriate) and resolved to the satisfaction of all concerned. Matters about a student should not be addressed directly to a child, but should be directed to a staff member for management of the process of investigation, communication and resolution.

Where an issue arises, the process should proceed as follows:

- raise the issue with the appropriate teacher and arrange a meeting to discuss the issue in detail. This is the preferred approach, rather than raising the issue in passing
- at the meeting, details of the issue, a timeframe for resolution and other relevant information should be agreed and documented
- the teacher is responsible for informing the parent/guardian on progress

The process is completed when the situation reaches an outcome satisfactory to all. Should this not be the case, the process should continue.

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Step 2 – Involve the Person of Added Responsibility (PAR)

Where the first step has not provided a resolution satisfactory to all parties, the process should be referred to the PAR either in writing or through a meeting with the PAR. This involves additional support and further documentation of the issue to ensure an appropriate resolution.

The process is intended to proceed as follows:

- should a satisfactory outcome not be achieved through the first step, the PAR may be approached with a request to schedule a meeting to be attended by the appropriate parties
- prior to the meeting, the issue should be documented by the person raising the matter
- once again, the discussion should be documented and agreed outcomes monitored • if the matter is resolved, no further steps are required

Step 3 – Involve the Principal

If a resolution is not reached, the next step is to request the assistance of the Principal.

As a result of further discussions, there may be two outcomes: actions may be agreed and monitored or, the Principal may take a final decision.

Again, all discussions are documented.

Under normal circumstances, this should be the conclusion of the matter – it is unlikely that it will be appropriate for the Board to be involved in the resolution of grievances. Should the Board become involved, it will only be after the issue has progressed through all previous stages of the process. This is to ensure the facts have been confirmed and to allow the grievance procedure to follow its natural course.

Step 4 – Involve the Board

If the process outlined above has not been followed, the Board will refer the matter back to the relevant staff members.

The Board will not become involved in educational and operational issues. The Board will confirm that staff and management have followed a sound method in assessing the facts and may call on an independent educational expert for input if it considers this to be necessary.

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The Board will only consider matters:

- dealing with fiduciary and long range planning and
- where a person considers the Principal has not followed the Grievance Process or has not done so fairly and in accordance with the School's principles and values.
- In such cases, a subcommittee consisting of the Board Chair, and two other Board Members will resolve the matter.

CONSIDERATIONS

All the documentation that is produced while resolving a disagreement is kept in a Register of Grievances. Because these documents can contain confidential material these files should not be accessible to everyone.

The file in the register of complaints may only be accessed by:

- the Principal
- the staff member whom the file concerns, after asking the Principal
- the Principal may give an appropriate person permission to look in the file concerning the grievance

It is important to keep good documentation for the following reasons:

- people often have different recollections of discussions and meetings
- if there is a change of staff, the new staff member must be able to see the history of an unresolved dispute

Complaints Meeting Record

Date: _____ Time: _____

Meeting called by:

Attended by:

Issue/s discussed:

Content:

Outcome/Action:

Follow-up:

Signed by: _____ Date: _____

Signed by: _____ Date: _____