



## The Cottage School Inc.

### GRIEVANCE RESOLUTION

Approved by Committee December 2019

The Cottage School aims to provide a supportive and harmonious environment for its staff, students, families, neighbours and all who come into contact with the School.

Grievances occur when a person complains that an action or decision has been taken (or has not been taken) that they feel is unfair, discriminatory or unjustified, infringes upon the principles of merit or equity or they believe to be in breach of a relevant Act, Regulation or Order.

The Cottage School recognises the right of staff, students and others to register a complaint or grievance and aims to resolve grievances fairly, efficiently and in a timely manner.

The desired outcome is the resolution of grievances and restoration of relationships within the School, however, the School recognises that this is not always possible and mediation provided by an outside body, and as a last resort, legal process is open to all parties.

Everyone should be aware of, and have access to, the grievance policy and procedures. The policy and procedure flow charts are available on the school's website.

No person should be victimised as a result of lodging a grievance. Everyone will be treated with courtesy and respect.

Any grievance or complaint may be withdrawn by the complainant at any time, without penalty.

Writing down the problem:

- can clarify one's thinking and personal accountability
- serves as a record of events should the grievance go to mediation

## Procedures

### External Resolution Process

You may request external professional mediation with the person involved at any time. A person with a grievance should approach the School Leader to organize mediation between both parties with the school's Employee Assistance Service provider or a mediator of your choice. If the grievance is with the School Leader then approach the President instead.

### Informal In-School Resolution Process

An informal process involves speaking directly with the person involved. While this may sometimes seem difficult, conflicts or issues often start small, so engage in the process of conflict resolution as soon as possible with the relevant person. While it may be helpful to talk to a trusted support person, it is not helpful to share your grievance with others, including the Committee, instead of following the grievance process.

### Communication

The culture of the school community is determined by what people say. What we say and how we say it is important. Good communication is central to a strong community.

Following is a list of general points demonstrating emotional and social literacy to foster positive communication and pro-social behaviour. These points should be considered before engaging in the grievance process. Parties should read the list before they proceed and keep in mind the relevant points during the process.

Approach the involved party/ies and initiate a conversation:

- Meet in a place that is free of distractions and interruptions
- Establish a mutually acceptable timetable for responding to one another's concerns
- Listen actively without trying to formulate an immediate response
- Parties should be given time to think and prepare
- Consider carefully what you want to say
- Be clear and precise
- Take steps to understand the nature of the conflict from the other person's perspective
- Create an atmosphere of empathy by avoiding criticism, threatening or name-calling
- Be transparent, open and honest in your communication
- Be consistent in the message that you're giving so that everyone is getting the same message
- Be polite and maintain control of emotions such as fear, anger and hostility. Reacting and communicating can be quite different
- Be aware of blocking communication by your own non-verbal communication
- Avoid blame, by using I statements
- Identify an ideal result or resolution in the conflict
- Stay on topic
- Take turns to listen and to speak
- Show respect and consideration for the well-being of participants in the process
- The process should be about identifying a solution not seeking to apportion blame
- Seek positive outcome resolutions at all times

If parties are not able to enter the process observing these fundamentals of effective communication, or if talking with the person concerned does not resolve the grievance, you may move to the formal resolution process.

You may request external professional mediation at any time.

#### **Formal In-School Resolution Process**

You may lodge the grievance with the School Leader. A student should ask a trusted adult (an Advocate) to help them lodge their grievance.

If any aggrieved person feels that the School Leader is not appropriate in their particular case (ie due to conflict of interest) then the President should be contacted and they will deal with the issue or appoint an appropriate person to deal with that particular circumstance.

A copy of the Grievance Policy will be provided to persons lodging a grievance as soon as the grievance is lodged.

Once a grievance is lodged the School Leader or Student Advocate will coordinate all discussions between the parties involved. Only the issues relevant to that grievance will be considered. All discussions are confidential.

The Student Advocate assists students to find a resolution to their grievance. Should the student's parents wish to pursue the grievance, the parents must follow the grievance process for families and the School Leader must be advised. It is not the role of the Student Advocate to manage parents' grievances.

Within 48 hours the relevant Liaison will contact the parties involved and ascertain the details of the grievance. The grievance will be recorded in a register kept in the School office which outlines the date, general nature of the grievance (ie parent complained of student's behaviour in the playground) without

identifying any of the parties, and the action taken. No-one except the Liaison involved, the Vice President and the President of the Committee or the parties involved may access the particular item on the register.

Within a further 3 working days the Liaison will forward a recommended course of action including recommended timing to the Committee. This recommendation may include professional mediation, supervised meetings between the parties or counselling with the aim of re-establishing a harmonious relationship between the parties. The Liaison's recommendation will not include details of the grievance. At no stage will details of the grievance be divulged to Committee members apart from the President.

The Liaison must maintain a record of all details which will remain confidential and released only to the Committee President upon request. This record remains the property of the School. Should a Liaison cease their tenure during the grievance resolution process the record will be passed to the newly appointed Liaison. Once a matter is resolved, these details will be placed in a sealed envelope and kept in a secure file in the School office.

If a complaint is brought against a person then that person will be informed of the nature and content of the complaint as soon as practicable and have the right of reply.

Any party has the right to have a support person present at any meeting or discussions.

All parties will be informed in writing of the outcome of any grievance lodged with either Liaison.

The person lodging a grievance may request mediation provided by an outside body at any stage of the grievance resolution process. Requests for mediation are made to the relevant Liaison or the Student Advocate.

Whilst the aim of the grievance process is to restore relationships through open communication or mediation, the School recognises this is not always possible. As a last resort, legal process is open to all parties. All legal requirements will be binding on the parties involved in the grievance process and will constitute a settlement of the matter.

Where the grievance is of a serious nature and may involve summary or criminal charges then a report should be lodged with police by the complainant.

Refer to Appendix 1/4.2-C :

*Grievance Resolution Flow Chart for Families*

*Grievance Resolution Flow Chart for Employees*

*Grievance Resolution Flow Chart for Students*

*Grievance Resolution Flow Chart for the Broader Community*