



Guide to handling complaints about ACT public schools and the Education and Training Directorate.

1. OVERVIEW

- 1.1. The Education and Training Directorate (the Directorate) is committed to addressing the complaints it receives from parents, carers, students and members of the community about ACT public schools and the Directorate in a manner that is courteous, efficient, fair and prompt. The Directorate is also committed to establishing and nurturing positive partnerships between schools and their communities.
- 1.2. This procedural guide is designed to assist ACT public school and Directorate staff to manage complaints at the local level and respond to complainants who pursue further avenues of complaint resolution.
- 1.3. The following steps constitute the Directorate's complaints handling processes:
 - i. In the first instance, complainants should take a concern or complaint to the school or the area of the Directorate responsible for the matter. This is referred to as the 'local level'. As appropriate, the Liaison Unit will assist the complainant to contact the 'local level' directly, unless there are special circumstances which prevent this.
 - ii. Having followed the local level's complaint's handling processes - a complainant may lodge a *Written Complaint* with the Directorate through the Liaison Unit.
 - iii. Having lodged a *Written Complaint* with the Directorate, and received a written response - a complainant may request a review of the decision relating to the complaint by writing to the Director, Information, Communications and Governance.
 - iv. A complainant may also request a review of the processes relating to their complaint through the relevant external agency such as the Human Rights Commission, ACT Ombudsman or Australian Information Commissioner.
- 1.4. All ACT public schools and areas within the Directorate are responsible for managing complaints referred to them as the 'local level'.
- 1.5.1 Local levels are responsible for:
 - developing processes to receive and address concerns and complaints
 - communicating these processes to staff and stakeholders
 - providing information about the written complaint process to complainants who are not satisfied with the local level's response

- referring concerns or appeals about student non-attendance, out of area enrolment, suspensions or exclusions to the Office for Schools
- displaying the *Complaints Poster* in all relevant reception areas.

1.5.2 The Liaison Unit is responsible for:

- assisting complainants to identify the local level where the complaint should initially be raised
- providing complainants with information about the Directorate's *Complaints Policy Education and Training* and procedures, access to the *Complaints Form* and assistance relating to complaints
- liaising with school principals and complainants to achieve a resolution of matters of concern and re-engage the complainant with the school
- notifying the appropriate Director or School Network Leader of all complaints raised with the Liaison Unit
- referring concerns about a principal to the Office for Schools
- recording and categorising all requests for assistance made to the Liaison Unit
- managing the *Written Complaint* process
- recording and categorising all *Written Complaints* lodged with the Liaison Unit
- developing and distributing the *Complaints Poster* to principals and managers
- communicating the complaints procedures to principals, directors and managers.

1.5.3 The Legal Liaison section is responsible for:

- managing requests for review of decisions relating to *Written Complaints*
- coordinating responses to complaints made under a range of administrative law provisions.

1.5.4 The Office for Schools is responsible for:

- providing parents with assistance with appeals relating to out of area placements/enrolments, suspensions and exclusions
- handling complaints relating to Principals.

1.5.5 The Human Resources Branch is responsible for handling complaints relating to staff or employment.

2 SCHOOL SPECIFIC PROCEDURES

- 2.1 Each school should develop processes by which concerns and complaints are addressed at the local level.
- 2.2 School processes should be communicated to staff and parents by:
- discussing them in regular staff meetings
 - publishing them on the school's website and each term in the school newsletter

- displaying the *Complaints Poster*: Do you have a concern or complaint about your school? (Attachment 5) in all reception areas.

2.3 These processes should

- emphasise that complaints should initially be raised at the local level i.e. with the class teacher/ tutor/ pastoral care teacher/ subject teacher
- provide a pathway whereby complaints can be referred to a supervising staff member / executive team member and then to the principal if the concern has not been resolved
- specifically cater for the cultural needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families
- specifically cater for the concerns of parents of students with a disability and the needs of parents with a disability
- ensure that staff are provided with appropriate training and support in the handling of concerns and complaints, including access to the guide which outlines the Directorate's complaints handling processes
- assist staff to keep accurate records about the concerns and complaints raised at the local level and how and when the matter was resolved
- refer complainants to the Office for Schools for appeal processes relating to out of area enrolments and placements, suspensions and exclusions.

2.4 Where a complainant is not satisfied with the local level's response, the principal should refer the complainant to the Directorate's *Complaints Form* which is attached to the *Complaints Policy – Education and Training Directorate* and available on the policy section of the Directorate's website.

3 PROCEDURES FOR MANAGING WRITTEN COMPLAINTS

3.1 If a complainant is not satisfied with a response to the complaint, the complainant may lodge a *Written Complaint* with the Manager, Liaison Unit at: ETD.Complaints@act.gov.au or GPO Box 158 CANBERRA ACT 2601 by using the *Complaints Form* (Attachment 3) or by letter or email. The *Complaints Form* is available on the Directorate's website at www.det.act.gov.au/publications_and_policies/policy_a-z

3.2 The Liaison Unit will:

- acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 5 business days of receipt by the Liaison Unit
- provide the complainant with the reference number for the *Written Complaint* and the area of the Directorate that the complaint has been referred for further action
- provide the complainant with a copy of *Complaints Policy – Education and Training Directorate* and complainant guide *Attachment 1* which details the relevant time frames
- develop an investigation plan

- when necessary schedule a meeting with the Director, Information, Communications and Governance and the Office for Schools and/or relevant Director where the complaint is referred for action and response
- register the *Written Complaint* and record all actions and the outcome
- coordinate the written response to the complainant signed by the appropriated Director within 25 business days of complaint being lodged with Liaison Unit
- on case by case basis an interim response will be provided to the complainant with the final written response provided within a further 25 business days.