



# SAMFORD VALLEY STEINER SCHOOL COMPLAINTS RESOLUTION SYSTEM AND PROCEDURES.

## **Samford Valley Steiner School Complaints Resolution System**

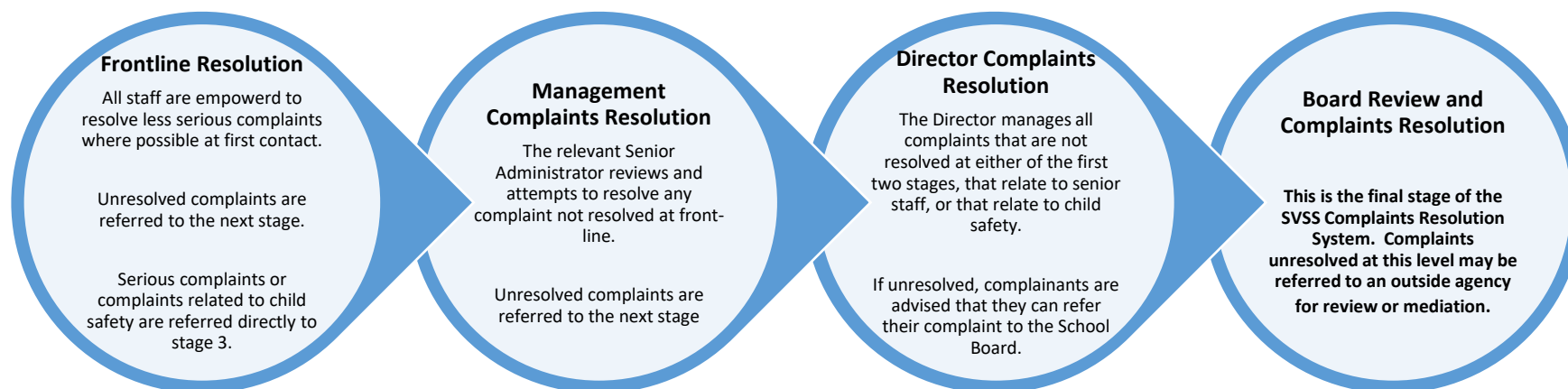
The SVSS Complaints Resolution System has four stages and comprehensive procedures for management of complaints at each tier of the system. This system is relevant to complaints received from parents, students, staff and community members.

SVSS's CRS is a step by step way to make, receive, record, assess, review, respond and report on complaints. It recognises that complaints are usually, in the first instance, made verbally to staff and are often and desirably resolvable at first contact. At all times, complaints resolution should focus on maintenance of relationship and be addressed with the least amount of formality that is appropriate. This excludes any complaint that is related to harm to a child; these complaints must be referred immediately to the school Director.

Decisions made at any stage of the CRS process may be overturned by a more senior staff member if the complaint is escalated.

Questions about the CRS should be directed to the School Director.

# THE COMPLAINT RESOLUTION SYSTEM AT A GLANCE.



**Stage 1:** Wherever possible complaints are initially managed and resolved by the person either receiving the complaint or to whom the complaint is directed.

**Stage 2:** Unresolved complaints are referred to the relevant staff member's immediate up-line manager i.e. complaints related to teaching staff or educational operations should be referred to the relevant Education Administrator; complaints related to administration should be referred to the Economic Development Manager. To avoid complainant fatigue, if the up-line manager believes that they will not be able to resolve the complaint at their level they will immediately refer the complaint to the Director.

**Stage 3:** Unresolved complaints, complaints relating to senior staff and complaints related to child safety are referred to the Director.

**Stage 4:** Complaints remaining unresolved in any of the first three stages, may be referred to the School Board of Directors.



## MAKING A COMPLAINT

A school is a complex organism that is based on human relationships. As such there is much potential for difficulties to arise in relationships, for disagreements to occur and for individuals to have disparate goals and views. At SVSS all members of our community are valued and respected and we acknowledge the right of all to make complaint or attempt to address their issues and/or concerns. SVSS is committed to ensuring that all complaints are dealt with in a fair and equitable manner. We have processes and support networks in place to enable you to work through any issues or concerns you may have.

Complaints can be made:

- By telephone or in person (preferred)
- In writing
- Anonymously (although anonymous complaints are difficult to resolve and are therefore discouraged, anonymous complaints will be assessed upon their merit if enough verifiable information is provided). All anonymous complaints will be referred directly to the Director.
- If a complaint is made on a person's behalf, the SVSS representative receiving the complaint will check that the person is happy for SVSS to respond directly to their representative.

To achieve an effective resolution for all parties, when making a complaint, you should ensure you:

- provide complete and factual information in a timely manner
- deliver your complaint in a calm and reasoned manner
- avoid making frivolous or vexatious complaints
- avoid using deliberately false or misleading information.

You should be aware that if you are making a complaint about a staff member, in most instances, the staff member will be told of the complaint and offered the right of reply. You also have the right to have a support person participate throughout the process.

Reviewed and updated 30/05/2019

# MAKING A COMPLAINT

**The following four-step complaints procedure is in place to assist parents/carers, students and school staff to reach a positive outcome when issues arise.**

**1. Discuss your complaint with the teacher or staff member involved.**

- Make an appointment with the person involved as soon as possible; avoid making complaints in the moment or when emotionally charged and, where possible, give the person warning that you wish to bring a concern/complaint prior to the discussion.
- Discuss your complaint calmly with the person and give them opportunity to suggest a solution. In most cases, direct discussion should result in your concern being resolved.
- If you do not feel that your complaint has been satisfactorily addressed, advise the person that you intend to take the matter to the next stage of the resolution process. Alternatively, you and the person involved may agree to seek support to undertake an informal conflict resolution in an attempt to resolve the problem together; this can be organised by contacting the person's immediate manager.

**2. Discuss your complaint with the involved party's immediate manager – see table on the following page.**

- Make an appointment to see the appropriate senior staff member to discuss the issue further.
- If you do not feel that your complaint has been satisfactorily addressed, advise the person that you intend to take the matter to the next stage of the resolution process.

**3. Discuss your complaint with the School Director**

- Contact administration and advise that you wish to meet with the Director to discuss a complaint/concern.
- Administration will provide you with a Complaint Resolution Request form (or you can download this directly from the website) which you will need to complete and forward to the Director prior to a meeting being organised.
- If you have discussed your complaint with the Director and still feel that you have not reached a resolution, you have the right to contact and refer your complaint to the School Board of Directors

**4. Lodge a Formal Complaint with School Board of Directors**

- Complaints referred to the Board must be in writing and made using the school Complaints Resolution Request form.

**IMPORTANT NOTE: If you believe your complaint to be of a serious nature or if it is related to a Child Safety matter, please refer it directly to the School Director in writing.**

# MAKING A COMPLAINT

If you choose to escalate your complaint beyond Stage 1 of the Complaint Resolution System, you should contact the relevant staff member below:

Stage Two: Complaints not able to be resolved directly with the person involved		
Complaints regarding:	Relevant Manager/Senior Staff member	Contact
Student (excluding child safety matters), Education and Teachers/ Aides	Education Administrators:  Early Childhood: Marilou Aruallo  Primary School: Tracey Taylor  High School: Delaney Crawley	<a href="mailto:maruallo@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au">maruallo@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au</a>  <a href="mailto:ttaylor@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au">ttaylor@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au</a>  <a href="mailto:dcrawley@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au">dcrawley@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au</a>
Administration and fees/finances  Admin Staff  Buildings and Grounds	Economic Development Manager: Donna Jones	<a href="mailto:edm@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au">edm@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au</a>
Child Safety  Communications and/or Policy  Senior Staff  Anonymous Complaints	Director: Pep Wright	<a href="mailto:director@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au">director@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au</a>
Stage Three: Complaints not able to be resolved with the relevant Senior Staff member		
All complaints	Director: Pep Wright	<a href="mailto:director@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au">director@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au</a>
Stage Four: Complaints not able to be resolved by the School Director		
All Complaints	Board President: Michael Ryan	<a href="mailto:board_pres@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au">board_pres@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au</a>

# MAKING A COMPLAINT

**IMPORTANT NOTE: If you believe your complaint to be of a serious nature or if it is related to a Child Safety matter, please refer it directly to the School Director in writing.**

## **What to expect once you have made a complaint:**

It is our intention to manage all complaints in a timely, equitable and fair manner. Complaints that are complex or involve multiple views on events and circumstances may require an investigative period which may extend the normal reasonable complaints resolution period. If your complaint is likely to take longer than the time frames related below you will be advised and updated regularly regarding progress of your complaint.

**Table A: Timeframes for Managing Complaints:**

Complaint Stage	Timeframe for response/action
<b>Stages One and Two</b>	
After advising the relevant staff member that you wish to raise a complaint.	<p>All written or verbal complaints will be acknowledged upon receipt or within 2 working days</p> <p>A meeting will be organised within 3 working days of the staff member receiving notification that you wish to meet regarding a complaint.</p> <p>If a meeting cannot be organised within that time frame because of the circumstances of either party, an initial phone conversation will be offered within the 3 day period and a suitable meeting time agreed upon if required; this will be no longer than 5 working days from when the complaint is raised.</p> <p>If the complaint requires investigation, deliberation or action by the SVSS staff member, progress reports or final advice will be offered at appropriate intervals to be agreed upon and documented by the concerned parties.</p> <p>Complaints not resolved within the agreed upon timeframe can be referred to the next stage by either party</p>
<b>Stage Three: Director Complaints Resolution</b>	
After submitting a Complaints Resolution Request form to the Director	<p>All Complaints Resolution Request forms will be acknowledged in writing upon receipt or within 2 working days.</p> <p>A phone call and/or meeting will be organised within 10 working days depending on the seriousness of the complaint.</p>

	<p>If the complaint requires investigation, deliberation or action by the Director, progress reports or final advice will be offered at appropriate intervals to be agreed upon by the concerned parties.</p> <p>Upon resolution or final advice regarding the complaint at Stage 3, you will receive a written report which covers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The issue raised</li> <li>• How the issues were considered</li> <li>• The people who were consulted</li> <li>• The action that has been or is to be taken</li> </ul> <p>The above time-frames and procedures may not apply if the complaint is deemed by the Director to be vexatious. If this is the case, the complainant will be advised in writing that the complaint has been deemed vexatious and will not be pursued; the reasons for this determination will be provided.</p> <p>Complaints not resolved within the agreed upon timeframe can be referred to Stage 4 by either party.</p> <p>The Board will be advised by the Director of any complaints that remain unresolved after 28 days from the commencement of Stage Three of the CRS.</p>
<b>Stage Four: Board Review and Complaints Resolution</b>	
After submitting a Complaints Resolution Request to the Board President	<p>All Complaints Resolution Request forms will be acknowledged in writing upon receipt or within 5 working days.</p> <p>The Board meets on a monthly basis and will consider the complaint at the next scheduled meeting. The complainant will be advised in the acknowledgement of receipt the date of the next Board meeting.</p> <p>A progress report or final advice will be received within 5 working days of the Board meeting at which the matter is discussed. If the matter is not resolved at this point or final advice has not been determined, the complainant will be advised of the timeframe within which they can expect to receive final advice or further progress reports.</p> <p>Final advice will be received in writing and will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The issue raised</li> <li>• How the issues were considered</li> <li>• The people who were consulted</li> <li>• The action that has been or is to be taken</li> </ul>

# RECEIVING AND MANAGING A COMPLAINT

SVSS acknowledges that complaints:

- are inevitable and must be managed effectively
- are about accountability
- can lead to growth and improvement

SVSS:

- acknowledges the right of individual stakeholders, parents, students, staff and community members, to make complaint when dissatisfied with a service or event
- supports staff to be 'feedback friendly' and not defensive or negative about feedback and complaints
- recognises that properly handled and analysed, complaints and feedback help the school to improve processes and can lead to individual and institutional growth and development

There are 5 Phases to receiving and managing a complaint within the SVSS CRS. These 5 phases are relevant regardless of which stage the complaint has reached or is being managed at.

- |          |  |
|----------|--|
| Phase 1. | Receiving and clarifying the complaint |
| Phase 2. | Deciding how to handle the complaint   |
| Phase 3. | Investigating the complaint            |
| Phase 4. | Making a decision about the complaint  |
| Phase 5. | Review and reflection                  |



These Phases as outlined below are descriptive of the steps a staff member should consider in the process of receiving and managing complaints. They should be read and implemented in conjunction with and in adherence to the requirements set out in Table A: Time-frames for Managing Complaints.

# RECEIVING AND MANAGING A COMPLAINT

## **Phase 1 - Receiving and clarifying the complaint**

**Any staff member receiving a complaint should always:**

- be respectful and helpful
- give the person their undivided attention
- avoid becoming defensive, or apportioning blame
- remain positive
- be respectful and helpful
- acknowledge the issue and request the conversation be postponed if feeling uncomfortable or threatened

**When a staff member receives a verbal complaint they:**

- listen carefully to the issues being raised
- summarise the issues to clarify and check that they understand what the complainant is saying
- empathise and acknowledge the complainant's feelings
- find out what the complainant wants to happen as a result of the complaint
- tell the complainant that they may use the support of a third party in progressing the complaint, if they feel this is needed
- resolve the complaint if possible, or assure the complainant that an appropriate staff member will address their complaint
- advise the complainant what will happen with their complaint
- thank them for coming to resolve the issue

Many complaints are resolved at the first point of contact with information and/or an explanation, sometimes together with an apology and recognition of the effect the situation has had on the person. Some complainants may also want an undertaking that action will be taken to prevent the problem recurring.



## RECEIVING AND MANAGING A COMPLAINT

**A member of staff who receives a verbal complaint that is not resolved immediately, informs the complainant of the further options of:**

- putting their complaint in writing, or
- assisting the member of staff to record, in writing, the particulars of their complaint.

In general, if the complainant agrees to put the complaint in writing, the member of staff takes no further action unless or until a written complaint is received.

If the complainant indicates that they would like help to record and register a formal complaint, the member of staff makes a written outline of the issues concerned. The record is read to the complainant, with opportunity for appropriate amendments and the complainant is asked to sign, where possible, the written version of the complaint. The staff member also signs and dates the complaint.

No signature is required for verbal complaints taken over the phone, but the complainant is asked to provide verbal confirmation of the issues that have been recorded.

If a complainant refuses to sign or confirm a written recording of a verbal complaint, the staff member notes the refusal on the written complaint. The complainant is told that this refusal will be noted and that the process will be reliant on the staff member's interpretation and notes only. The complainant may not, at a later date, make another complaint based on a lack of satisfaction with this record of complaint.

If the complaint relates to a report about harm (whether physical/emotional/sexual) of a student the complainant should be referred directly to the Director. If the complainant is not willing to take the complaint formally to the Director, the member of staff receiving the complaint must record as much detail as possible and refer this immediately to the Director.

### **Receiving a written complaint:**

When a staff member receives a written complaint they should contact the complainant to arrange a meeting within 3 days of receiving the complaint (refer to Table A: Time-frames for Managing Complaints.)

Depending on the nature of the complaint, the staff member may choose to request support for the meeting or refer it directly to their immediate up-line manager.

A copy of the written complaint must be dated and saved in the appropriate location as per Table B: Recording Complaints Received



# RECEIVING AND MANAGING A COMPLAINT

## **Receiving an anonymous complaint:**

When an anonymous complaint is received, the complainant is told of the possible limitations associated with making an anonymous complaint.

All anonymous complaints are referred directly to the Director.

## **Receiving a complaint about another member of staff:**

The SVSS CRS recognises that complaints are generally best resolved when directed to the person concerned.

A staff member receiving a complaint about another member of staff should:

- direct the complainant to the person concerned
- if the complainant is not comfortable speaking with the person concerned, direct the complaint to the immediate up-line manager of the person concerned

## **Phase 2 - Deciding how to handle the complaint**

### **When a front-line staff member receives a complaint, they:**

- make an assessment in the first instance about whether the issue can be dealt with immediately as a concern or a complaint
- make an assessment as to whether the seriousness of the complaint warrants a request to formalise it in writing
- make an assessment as to whether they believe they can resolve the complaint or if it should be referred to the subsequent tier of the CRS.
- record details of the complaint: all concerns and complaints must be recorded by the staff member receiving them, in writing for future review and reference



# RECEIVING AND MANAGING A COMPLAINT

## **When an up-line manager receives a complaint, they:**

- ask the complainant if they have spoken directly to the person concerned and/or what steps they have taken to try and resolve the complaint; if appropriate. If the person refuses to speak directly to the person involved, the complaint should still be received and considered upon its merit
- make an assessment as to whether they believe they can resolve the complaint or if it should be referred directly to the Director
- record the complaint in the appropriate location as per Table B: Recording Complaints Received
- consider what resolution strategies might be used to resolve or prevent further escalation of the complaint
- initiate an investigation of the complaint, within the school, if further information is required

## **When the Director receives a complaint, they:**

- review the actions taken at previous stages and decide whether or not further action is warranted and advises the complainant of that decision
- attempt to resolve the complaint through resolution strategies such as mediation
- initiate an investigation of the complaint, within the school, if further information is required.
- If the complaint is in relation to student harm, the Director reports the complaint to the appropriate legal and regulatory departments as per the school's child safety policy
- ensures that a record the complaint is saved in the appropriate location as per Table B: Recording Complaints Received

## **When the Board receives a complaint, they:**

- Review the actions taken at previous stages and decide whether or not further action is warranted
- Advise the complainant of that decision in writing
- Maintain appropriate records of the discussion and decision



# RECEIVING AND MANAGING A COMPLAINT

## **Phase 3 - Investigating the complaint**

The staff member, up-line manager or Director gathers all the necessary facts about the complaint while keeping in mind the principles of natural justice of all parties concerned.

Complaints can be investigated by:

- collecting and analysing information relevant to the matter
- working collaboratively with all people involved
- finding the facts relating to the matter
- identifying any contributing factors to the matter
- documenting the investigation report or outcome.

## **Phase 4 - Making a decision about the complaint**

Based on the facts gathered in Phase 3 about the complaint, the staff member, up-line manager or Director makes a decision on the complaint.

The person/s making the decision should notify the complainant of their decision in writing including the reasons for the decision.

## **Phase 5 Review Phase**

If the complainant is not satisfied with this response, they are advised of their option to escalate their complaint under the CRS.

Decisions made at any stage of the CRS process may be overturned by a more senior staff member if the complaint is escalated.

Ensure an appropriate record of the complaint has been made and stored in the appropriate location as specified in Table B on the following page, and including all the required information as specified in the ***Information to Include When Recording a Complaint*** section of this document.

## RECORDING A COMPLAINT

**Table B: Recording Complaints Received:**

Complaints received by:	Complaints about:	Location for filing:
Teachers	General classroom/learning related that are resolved at the frontline.	Own records to be kept; hard copy notes or digital notes are acceptable (these must be kept for a minimum of 2 school years and made available upon request to Senior Management)
	Another student/s	A full record to be kept against both/all students files on TASS. Please note all teaching staff have access to these records. If the file contains sensitive information, a general note should be made against the student's file on TASS and a detailed record should be forwarded to the Education Administrator or the Director for confidential filing.
	Another teacher	A full record should be taken and forwarded to the relevant Education Administrator for filing
Education Administrators	General complaints	A full record to be filed on the server: \\10.0.2.130\Staff\Administration\000 GENERAL\030 SCHOOL ROUTINE AND ORGANISATION\039 Complaints

Complaints received by:	Complaints about:	Location for filing:
	Students	<p>A full record to be kept against all involved students' files on TASS. Please note all teaching staff have access to these records. If the file contains sensitive information, a general note should be made against the student's file on TASS and a detailed record should be saved on the server:</p> <p>\\10.0.2.130\Staff\Administration\000 GENERAL\030 SCHOOL ROUTINE AND ORGANISATION\039 Complaints</p>
	Teachers/staff members	A full record is to be made and forwarded to the Director or Economic Development Manager for filing
Economic Development Manager	General Complaints	<p>A full record to be filed on the server:</p> <p>\\10.0.2.130\Staff\Administration\000 GENERAL\030 SCHOOL ROUTINE AND ORGANISATION\039 Complaints</p>
	Staff	A full record to be filed against the staff members confidential file on TASS



## RECORDING A COMPLAINT

Complaints received by:	Complaints about:	Location for filing:
Director	General Complaints	A full record to be saved on the server: <a href="#">\\10.0.2.130\Staff\Administration\Director\Complaints Received</a>
	Students	A full record to be kept against all involved students' files on TASS. Please note all teaching staff have access to these records. If the file contains sensitive information, a general note should be made against the student's file on TASS and a detailed record should be saved on the server: <a href="#">\\10.0.2.130\Staff\Administration\Director\Complaints Received\Students</a>
	Staff	A full record to be filed against the staff members confidential file on TASS
Board	Any complaints	Filed by the Board Secretary



# RECORDING A COMPLAINT

## **Information to include when recording a complaint:**

When recording a complaint include the following details as a minimum: other relevant information may also be included:

- the name and contact details of the person making the complaint
- date the complaint was received
- timeframes of the entire process – response timeframes and dates
- how the complaint was received e.g. telephone, in person, via email
- what the complaint is about
- information collected (what, when and from whom) and considered during the investigative or decision making stages
- actions taken to fix the problem
- complaint decision and the reasons for the decision
- final response communicated to complainant and any communication received back from the complainant
- date complaint finalised.

Any written correspondence received relating to the complaint should be attached to the complaint file.

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# MANAGING VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS AND UNREASONABLE COMPLAINANT CONDUCT

While most complainants behave in a cooperative and respectful way and come with the intention to resolve issues, from time to time the school and staff are confronted with unreasonable complainant conduct (UCC).

UCC is any conduct by a current or former complainant which raises substantial health (emotional and physical), safety, resource or equity issues for the school, its staff and community.

SVSS acknowledges that people have a right to complain about perceived failings or issues that affect them, however, staff and all members of the community also have a right to dignity, physical and emotional safety, and respect.

SVSS recognises that the manner in which staff interact with complainants can contribute to UCC and have a significant effect on a complainants conduct and the quality of future interactions, and as such expects all staff to treat complainants fairly and respectfully, remain calm, act professionally and impartially and clearly communicate processes and outcomes in accordance with the Complaints Management Policy and associated procedures.

Staff are not expected to endure any conduct that can deemed unreasonable as defined above in the course of managing a complaint and should refer all such issues to the School Director.

When a vexatious complaint or UCC arises the Director will:

**Assess whether the complainants conduct is reasonable in the circumstances:**

- impact of conduct on staff, students or others
  - merit of the issues raised and the outcomes sought
  - complainant's circumstances - including history and previous interactions
  - proportionality – is the reaction/conduct reasonable for the seriousness of the issue/event
  - responsiveness/reaction to advice or decisions.
  - style/content of communication
  - whether personal boundaries have been breached.
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# MANAGING VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS AND UNREASONABLE COMPLAINANT CONDUCT

## **Identify and categorise possible conduct issue:**

- Persistent/nuisance
- Abusive/angry
- Demanding
- Uncooperative / argumentative

## **Select management strategies by considering:**

- history of complainant's interactions with staff/school
- history of success - what methods have already been used
- likely level of impact on staff, other clients and service delivery
- personal thresholds and skill level of complaint handlers
- school policy, procedures and protocol.

## **Implement strategies:**

- put strategies into practice
- record investigation, decisions and strategies
- communicate strategy to the complainant

## **Monitor strategies**

- complainant/staff response
  - level of success
  - alter strategy as required
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# MONITORING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CRS

SVSS has systems in place to regularly review and monitor the effectiveness of the CRS. Review systems are as follows:

Review purpose	Review mechanisms	Frequency	By Whom
Identify complaint trends and outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EAs and EDM will provide to the Director, a document summarising complaints managed and outcomes</li> </ul>	End of each term	EAs and EDM
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Director will review all complaints escalated to stage 3 of the CRS and review for trends</li> </ul>	End of each Semester or as necessary if multiple complaints are received	Director
Monitor the time taken to resolve complaints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When complaints are received at stages 2, 3 and 4, timeframes will be noted and recorded in the complaint file.</li> </ul>	During each complaints management process	Senior Staff member managing complaint
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Timeframes for resolution will be included in the above mentioned EA and EDM summary provided to the Director</li> </ul>	End of each term	EA
Review of general effectiveness of the CRS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Survey of staff</li> <li>Survey of parents</li> <li>Review of trends and outcomes data</li> </ul>	Annually	Director