



## Samford Valley Steiner School Complaints Resolution System

The Samford Valley Steiner School (SVSS) Complaints Resolution System (CRS) has four levels 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.

### Level 1 - Lodging a Complaint at a Local Level

- Start with talking through the complaint with the most appropriate staff member at the local level (teacher or Faculty Director)
- Complaints can be made by phone, email or in person
- Unresolved complaints are referred to the next stage
- Serious complaints or complaints related to child safety are referred directly to level 3

### Level 2 - Management Complaints Escalation

- The relevant Faculty Director reviews and attempts to resolve any complaint not resolved at level 1
- Unresolved complaints are referred to the next level

### Level 3 - School Director Complaints Escalation

- The School Director manages all complaints that are not resolved at either of the first two levels, or complaints that relate to senior staff or child safety
- If unresolved, complainants are advised that they can refer their complaint to the School Board

### Level 4 - Board Review and Complaints Escalation

- This is the final stage of the SVSS Complaints Resolution System
- Complaints unresolved at this level may be referred to an outside agency for review or mediation.

## [Complaints Resolution System link](#)

### **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 Kindergarten teacher, classroom teacher or guardian.
- b) Complaints about the School Director must be lodged with the Board [board\\_president@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au](mailto:board_president@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au)
- c) Complaints can be lodged through various methods, including
  - i. Phone
  - ii. Email
  - iii. In-person (by appointment)
- d) If the complainant is unsure where to direct their complaint, they can contact the reception for guidance [info@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au](mailto:info@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au)
- e) 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 to the School Director [csheard@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au](mailto:csheard@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au)
- f) Where an anonymous complaint is lodged, the school will follow the complaints handling policy, when there is sufficient information to do so.
- g) For formal complaints please direct the complaints to [complaints@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au](mailto:complaints@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au)
- h) For suspected vexatious complaints, refer to Appendix 4.

### **2. Acknowledgement, Assessment and Referral**

- a) The staff member receiving the complaint will:
  - i. acknowledge the complaint within two (2) business days, outlining the next steps and where possible the estimated timeframes.
  - ii. assess the complaint, using the definitions of informal and formal complaints in the Complaints Resolution policy, and refer the complaint to the informal or formal complaints process.

### **3. Registration and Support**

- a) The recipient of the complaint will promptly enter it onto the complaints register (refer to appendix 2 for recording a complaint), 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.
- c) 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.
- d) Refer to appendix 1 for steps on managing a complaint.

### **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.
- d) Informal complaints are recorded on the informal complaint register and formal complaints on the formal complaints register -refer to appendix 2 on how to record complaints.

## **5. Formal Complaints Handling Process**

- a) The formal process begins with the assessment of the complaint by a designated staff member (School Director or a member of the senior leadership team or the board chair for complaints against the School Director) - refer to appendix 1.
- b) The staff member may gather additional information through investigation, interviews, or evidence review.
- c) The Board meets monthly 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.
- d) A progress report or final advice will be received within five 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.
- e) The staff member will determine appropriate action, which may include:
  - iii. Mediation
  - iv. Disciplinary measures
  - v. Implementation of policy changes
  - vi. Referral to external agencies (e.g., police)
  - vii. Provision of written updates to the complainant throughout the process
  - viii. Other actions the School Directors determine as appropriate in the circumstances.

## **6. Formal Complaint Closure**

- a) The formal complaint register will be updated with the date the complaint is closed and a summary of the outcome.
- b) The complainant will receive written notification of the outcome and any actions taken where appropriate including:
  - The issue raised
  - How the issues were considered
  - The people who were consulted
  - The action that has been or is to be taken

## **7. Appeals Process**

- a) Complainants may appeal the outcome of a complaint by writing to:
  - i. the School Director (for complaints not previously managed by the School Director)

- ii. the board chair (for complaints previously managed by the School Director, or complaints about the School Director).

Complaints regarding:	Relevant Manager/Senior Staff member	Contact
Student (excluding child safety matters), education and/or teachers or teacher aides	Faculty Directors: EC: Marilou Araullo PS: Melinda Johnson HS: Andy Currey	<a href="mailto:maraullo@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au">maraullo@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au</a> <a href="mailto:mjohnson@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au">mjohnson@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au</a> <a href="mailto:acurrey@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au">acurrey@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au</a>
Host family (Student exchange)	School Director: Carly Sheard	<a href="mailto:csheard@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au">csheard@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au</a>
Student Exchange Organisation (Samford Valley Steiner School)	School Director: Carly Sheard Queensland Registration Authority	<a href="mailto:csheard@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au">csheard@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au</a> Phone (07) 3513 6748 or Email: <a href="mailto:internationalregistration@qed.gov.au">internationalregistration@qed.gov.au</a>
Administration and fees/finances, Admin Staff Buildings and Grounds	Economic Development Director: Margot Andersen	<a href="mailto:mandersen@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au">mandersen@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au</a>
Child Safety Communications and/or Policy Senior Staff	School Director: Carly Sheard	<a href="mailto:csheard@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au">csheard@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au</a>
<b>Level Three: Complaints not able to be resolved with the relevant Senior Staff member</b>		
All complaints	School Director: Carly Sheard	<a href="mailto:csheard@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au">csheard@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au</a>
Formal Complaints		<a href="mailto:complaints@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au">complaints@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au</a>
<b>Level Four: Complaints not able to be resolved by the School Director</b>		
All Complaints	Board President	<a href="mailto:board_president@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au">board_president@samfordsteiner.qld.edu.au</a>

## Appendix 1 Receiving and Managing a Complaint

SVSS acknowledges that complaints:

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

SVSS acknowledges the right of individual stakeholders, parents, students, staff and community members, to make a complaint when dissatisfied with a service or event supports staff to be 'feedback friendly' and not defensive or negative about feedback and complaints. 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 five phases to receiving and managing a complaint within the SVSS CRS. These five 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.

### 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
- 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 because 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
- record the complaint and next steps in writing

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.

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 later 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 School Director. If the complainant is not willing to take the complaint formally to the School Director, the member of staff receiving the complaint must record as much detail as possible and refer this immediately to the School Director using the Report of Suspected Harm form and should refer to the Child Protection Policy.

Receiving a written complaint:

- When a staff member receives a written complaint, they should contact the complainant to arrange a meeting within three working days of receiving the complaint
- 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

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

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 School Director
- record the complaint in the appropriate location
- 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 School Director receives a complaint, they:

- review the actions taken at previous stages and decide whether 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 School 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

When the Board receives a complaint, they:

- review the actions taken at previous stages and decide whether further action is warranted
- advise the complainant of that decision in writing
- maintain appropriate records of the discussion and decision

## Phase 3 - Investigating the complaint

The staff member, up-line manager or School Director gathers all the necessary facts about the complaint while keeping in mind the principles of natural justice and confidentiality 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
- if the School Director believes an external investigation is warranted, they will seek approval from the Board
- documenting the investigation report or outcome.

## Phase 4 - Deciding about the complaint

Based on the facts gathered in Phase 3 about the complaint, the staff member, up-line manager or School Director decides 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, including all the required information as specified in the Information to Include When Recording a Complaint (appendix 3).

## Appendix 2 Recording Complaints

<b>Complaints received by</b>	<b>Complaints about</b>	<b>Location for filing</b>
Teachers	General classroom/learning related that are resolved at the frontline.	Own records to be kept; hard copy notes or digital notes are acceptable, stored in Teacher Kiosk under the relevant student record
	Another student/s	A full record to be kept against both/all students files on Teacher Kiosk. 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 Teacher Kiosk and a detailed record should be forwarded to the Faculty Director or the School Director for confidential filing.
	Another teacher	A full record should be taken and forwarded to the relevant Faculty Director for further action and support.
Faculty Directors	General complaints	A full record to be filed on the portal in Leadership/Senior Leadership Team/Complaints Register
	Students	A full record to be kept against all involved students' files on Teacher Kiosk. Please note all teaching staff have access to these records. If the file contains sensitive information, a Confidential Note can be recorded. A full record to be filed on the portal in Leadership/Senior Leadership Team/Complaints Register if appropriate
	Teachers/staff members	A full record is to be made and forwarded to the School Director or for further action and support. Record complaint on Leadership/Senior Leadership Team/Complaints Register.
Economic Development Director	General Complaints	A full record to be filed on the portal in Leadership/Senior Leadership Team/Complaints Register
	Staff	A full record to be filed against the staff members confidential file on TASS and Leadership/Senior Leadership Team/Complaints Register.
School Director	General Complaints	A full record to be saved on the Leadership/Senior Leadership Team/Complaints Register.
	Formal Complaints	All documents and information to be kept in Leadership/Complaints in a separate file. Details to be recorded on Leadership/Complaints/Formal Complaints Register.

	Report of suspected harm	Full notes to be kept in confidential School Director folder
	Students	A full record to be kept against all involved students' files on Teacher Kiosk in Confidential Notes and recorded on the Leadership/Senior Leadership Team/Complaints Register.
	Staff	A full record to be filed against the staff members confidential file on TASS and recorded on the Leadership/Senior Leadership Team/Complaints Register
Board	Any complaints	Filed by the Board Secretary

## Appendix 3 - Information to include when recording a complaint

When recording a formal complaint include the following details as a minimum

- 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.

## Appendix 4 – Managing Vexatious Complaints

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, respect and non-victimisation.

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 Resolution Policy and associated procedures.

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

Identify and categorise possible conduct issue:

- Persistent/nuisance
- Abusive/angry
- Demanding
- Uncooperative / argumentative
- Disrespectful language or behaviour
- Wilful gossip or breaches of social media conduct as outlined in the parent/volunteer code of conduct
- Rallying support in the community
- Disrespect of school policy and procedure
- Lack of confidentiality

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 require