

1.0 PURPOSE

The purpose of this Policy is to ensure complaints and disputes involving students, parents and employees of Autism Queensland School (Autism Queensland Education and Therapy Centre – “the School”) are dealt with in a responsive, efficient, fair and effective manner.

2.0 SCOPE

This Policy applies to all employees of Autism Queensland (AQ). A reference to “employees” or “staff” includes permanent, fixed-term, temporary and casual employees, as well as directors, contractors, volunteers, people undertaking work experience or vocational placements at the School and other representatives acting on behalf of AQ in any capacity.

This Policy also applies to all AQ School students, their parents, carers and families.

3.0 POLICY

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

The School views complaints as part of an important feedback and accountability process. The School acknowledges the right of students, parents and employees to complain when dissatisfied with an action, inaction or decision of the School, and welcomes feedback.

The School recognises time spent handling complaints can be an investment in improving both the service provided to students and parents and the work environment created for employees.

4.0 SCHOOL COMPLAINTS

Autism Queensland encourages students, parents and employees to lodge promptly any concerns regarding sexual harassment, discrimination, workplace bullying and privacy breaches as well as more general complaints that may include:

- The School, its employees or students having done something wrong
- 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 contrary to their relevant Code of Conduct
- 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.

5.0 ISSUES OUTSIDE THIS POLICY

The following matters are **outside the scope** of this Policy:

- **Child protection** concerns, allegations or risks of harm to children, which should be dealt with in accordance with the law and the *Child Protection (School) Policy & Procedure*.
- **Student bullying** complaints, which should be dealt with under the *Positive Behaviour Support Policy & Procedure*.

- **Employee complaints** related to their employment, which should be directed to their Manager or Human Resources.
- Student or employee **violence or criminal matters**, which should be directed to the School Principal who will involve the Police as appropriate.
- **Formal legal** proceedings.

6.0 COMPLAINTS HANDLING PRINCIPLES

The School is committed to managing complaints in accordance with the *Complaints Management Policy* and 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
- The School will determine the appropriate person to deal with the complaint in the first instance
- 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
- The School will give reasonable progress updates
- Appropriate remedies will be offered and implemented
- A review pathway for parties to the complaint will be provided if warranted
- Complainants, respondents and people associated with them will not be victimised as a result of lodging a complaint 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.

6.1 External Complaints

The School, in some cases, may require involvement from external bodies. Complaints about Autism Queensland may also be directed to other external to bodies including, but limited to:

- Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC)
- Office of the Australian Information Commissioner
- Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (QCAT)
- Department of Transport and Main Roads
- Queensland Government – Department of Education
- Queensland Government – Department of Seniors, Disability Services and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships
- Queensland Government – Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs
- Workplace Health and Safety Queensland

7.0 RESPONSIBILITIES

7.1 AQ School

The School has the following role and responsibilities:

- Develop, implement, promote and act in accordance with the School's Complaints Handling Policy
- Appropriately communicate the School's Complaints Handling Policy and procedures to students, parents and employees
- Ensure 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 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 relevant
- Refer to the School's governing body immediately any claim for legal redress.

7.2 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, confidentiality and privacy maintained to the extent possible
- Provide complete and factual information in a timely manner
- Not provide deliberately false or misleading information
- Not make frivolous or vexatious complaints
- 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.

7.3 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
- Forward complaints to more senior employees, including the School Principal, as appropriate
- Not victimise or act in reprisal against the complainant, respondent or any person associated with them.

8.0 IMPLEMENTATION

Autism Queensland 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 related procedures.

Autism Queensland is also committed to appropriately training relevant employees (especially senior staff) on how to resolve complaints in line with this Policy and related procedures.

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

Autism Queensland 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.

9.0 RELATED DOCUMENTS

Legislation

Child Protection Act 1999 (Qld)

Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Act 2017 (Qld)

Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)

Autism Queensland Quality Assurance

Child Protection (School) Policy & Procedure

Code of Conduct

Privacy Policy

Positive Behaviour Support Policy & Procedure

Whistleblower Policy

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