Grievance Policy Statement

Aitken College welcomes feedback from all members of the College community and takes all complaints or concerns that may be raised seriously. This policy provides information about how concerns and complaints by parents and students can be made, as well as how complaints will be managed and resolved.

What is a Concern or Complaint about?

A concern or complaint may be about the College, staff conduct, or a student's education and/or wellbeing.

Complaints about child abuse, grooming or other harm, or other breaches of our Child Safety Code of Conduct, relating to conduct by:

- Current or former staff members
- Current or former students
- Other people on the College premises or at College events

are managed differently to other complaints.

Refer to the section at the end of this policy for more information: *Complaints About Child Safety Incidents or Concerns*.

Aitken College's Commitment

To manage concerns and complaints effectively and efficiently, the College has established a Complaints Handling Program in line with both the international complaints handling standard (ISO 10002:2014 Quality management - Customer satisfaction – Guidelines for complaints handling in organizations), and the Australian/New Zealand complaints handling standard (AS/NZS 10002:2014 Guidelines for complaint management in organizations). This program includes the establishment of an online complaints management system which allows the College to effectively capture, manage and report on concerns and complaints. Regular analysis of concerns and complaints received and the implementation of rectification action, where deficiencies are identified, are key to Aitken College's commitment.

The focus of this commitment is on the prompt resolution of concerns, ideally without a need for a complaint to be made, in a non-adversarial and productive manner. In line with the VRQA guidelines, procedural fairness is accorded to the complainant and the person(s) who are the subject of the complaint. Please note that the timeframes in this policy are indicative only.

The College has specific policies and procedures in place to respond to a range of issues. This includes:

- Child Safety

  The College is committed to student safety. Concerns and complaints that may give rise to child abuse or reportable conduct will be managed in accordance with the College's legal obligations and the *Reporting and Responding to Child Safety Concerns Policy Statement*.

- Whistleblowing

  Please refer to the *College Protected Disclosure (Whistleblowing) Policy* available on the College website.

What can you expect from the College

When raising a concern or complaint with the College, parents and students can expect to:

- Be treated with respect and courtesy.
- Have their concern or complaint taken seriously, considered impartially, and dealt with on the merits.
- Have their concern or complaint dealt with and resolved in a timely manner.
- Have access to appropriate and easily understandable information about the complaints process.
- Be kept informed of the progress and outcome of their concern or complaint.

Our expectations of you

- Treat others (including College staff) with respect and courtesy.
- Raise concerns as soon as possible after the event giving rise to the concern. Be aware that any delay in raising concerns may make it more difficult for the College to effectively investigate the matter.
- Provide complete and factual information about the concern or complaint, to the best of your ability.
- Ask for help or further information if needed.
- Act in good faith and in line with the College ethos and values to achieve a reasonable outcome.

Complaint Resolution Framework

The College should always be your first point of contact if you have a concern about your child's education and/or wellbeing. Teaching and learning work best when students, parents and teachers communicate with each other directly, and work together to resolve issues.

Informal Resolution by raising Concerns

Most issues causing concern in schools can be handled quickly and in an informal manner. In most cases, these issues can be resolved through discussions with appropriate staff members.

In the first instance, students and parents are requested to attempt to informally clarify or resolve the issue:

- Students are encouraged to politely approach the appropriate staff member (subject teacher, Homeroom Teacher, Head of Year, Deputy Head of Primary/Secondary or Assistant Principal) to organise a time to meet to calmly explain their concern. At this meeting, the student will be heard. The staff member may ask clarifying questions and seek to resolve the matter with the student.

- Parents are encouraged to communicate with the appropriate staff member (subject teacher, Homeroom Teacher, Head of Year, Deputy Head of Primary/Secondary or Assistant Principal) by telephone call, email or pre-arranged meeting. The purpose will usually be to seek clarification of an issue. Parents and staff may ask clarifying questions and seek to resolve the matter.

To assist students and parents in resolving their concerns, the College recommends the following:

- Clearly identify the issue or problem by focussing on facts; avoiding emotional language before contacting the College.
- Identify the party or parties involved.
- Consider the outcome(s) the student/parent hopes to achieve (while being realistic and listening respectfully to additional information, possible outcomes and solutions).
- Decide whether the issue or problem is in the nature of a concern, enquiry or grievance. This will help in finding a solution.

- If there is more than one issue or problem, write a list, articulating each one clearly.
- Remain courteous and calm when conveying your concerns. Staff may terminate conversations if respectful conversation is not maintained.

Staff members may request time to consider the matter to further investigate and consider options. The staff member will respond in due course by telephone, email, letter or by arranging a further meeting.

Staff are required to log issues through our complaints management system so we are able to identify any systemic issues arising and take appropriate rectification action.

If an issue is able to be resolved informally, staff will keep a record of discussions and keep copies of all correspondence on the student's file.

If agreement is not possible, the staff member dealing with the concern will make a decision as to how best to resolve the concern in a way that aligns with the College's policies and obligations.

Procedural Fairness
Procedural fairness in complaints handling requires:

- both the complainant and the person against whom the complaint is made to have the opportunity to be heard, in person or in writing as appropriate, and to respond to the allegations and/or evidence offered by the other
- an objective investigation of issues or facts which are in dispute
- that the investigator is free from bias, or the perception of bias, and is not 'judge in his or her own cause'
- that any complaint outcome is supported by the evidence, necessitating a finding on the balance of probabilities in the event of a dispute of fact
- that the complaint outcome is finalised by an adjudicator, who may also be the investigator, who is free from bias or the perception of bias
- that the outcome is consistent with the College's established policies and/or procedures relevant to the complaint.

It is the College's policy that these elements of procedural fairness are to be applied to each complaint received by the College.

Formal Resolution by making a complaint

If you have been unable to resolve a matter informally, or simply wish to make a formal complaint you can do so by any of the following means:

Writing a letter to the College or sending an email to admin@aitkencollege.edu.au addressed to the relevant Complaint Officer (see options below)

Topic of Concern	Complaint Officer
Discipline	Homeroom Teacher/Head of Year/Deputy Head of Primary or Secondary/Assistant Principal
Subject assessments	Subject teacher/Head of Year/Head of Faculty/ Deputy Head of Primary or Secondary/Assistant Principal

Awards or Colours	Assistant Principal/Deputy Principal
School fees and charges	Finance Manager
Privacy concerns	Deputy Principal
Enrolment issues	Director of Admissions
Administration of Child Safe Program*	Deputy Principal or Principal

If a complaint concerns the Principal, it should be addressed to the Chair of the College Board c/o admin@aitkencollege.edu.au.

Where possible, the complainant should aim to provide the following information:

- Name and contact details
- The person(s) on whose behalf the complaint is made (if applicable)
- Dates and times of any specific incidents
- Names of any students or staff relevant to the complaint (e.g. witnesses)
- What, when, where, why, what next.

*NOTE: The *Reporting and Responding to Child Safety Concerns Policy Statement* sets out the procedure that should be followed to raise a concern about student safety.

Step 1 – All valid complaints will be acknowledged by the relevant Complaint Officer, as soon as practicable. The relevant staff member may choose to schedule a meeting at which the complainant may choose to bring a support person (e.g. family member or friend). The role of the support person is to support and not to advocate for.

Role of support person:

- *Attend meetings*
- *Provide advice to the complainant*
- *Clarifying the process*
- *Taking notes*
- *Asking questions*

It is our target, where possible, to resolve all complaints within 14 days. Please be mindful that timeframes may differ during school holiday periods.

Possible Outcomes of a Complaint

- Agreed resolution of the dispute or grievance
- Agreed course of action towards a satisfactory outcome
- Confirmation of a decision consistent with College policy and obligations
- Arrangement for a subsequent meeting after further investigation of the matter
- Referral of the matter to a more senior staff member

Step 2 – All formal complaints are logged through our online complaints management system where they are screened by the Deputy Principal or Principal, or in the case of complaints against the Principal by the Chair of the College Board.

Step 3 – If the complainant is not satisfied with the complaints process or initial outcome, they may request a review by the Deputy Principal who shall conduct an investigation into the issues raised, following principles of procedural fairness, and make a further determination.

Step 4 - Following the determination, if appropriate, the Deputy Principal shall formulate a resolution and provide a written response to the complainant.

Step 5 - If the Deputy Principal's response is not accepted the complainant may wish to request a review by the Principal. The matter will be reviewed by the Principal, who may seek additional information from the relevant parties. The Principal seeks to resolve all complaints within 14 days from the date that the further review process is initiated, where practicable.

Requests for review of a decision by the Principal should be addressed to the Chair of the College Board. As a general rule, however, the Principal's decision is regarded as final.

Step 6 - All complaints received will be entered into our Complaints Register and, where appropriate, a corrective action request will be made to address any underlying processes which the complaints investigation revealed may require improvement.

Step 7 – The College acknowledges that in some cases parents may remain dissatisfied with the outcome of certain complaints and requests for review.

If you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of a request for review, you may choose to contact the relevant authorities, such as the Victorian Registration & Qualifications Authority, Victorian Institute of Teaching, or Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP), depending upon the nature of your concern or complaint. In some cases, the College may be able to provide mediation.

Withdrawal of a complaint

A complaint can be withdrawn by a parent at any stage during the processes outlined in this policy. A complaint should preferably be retracted in writing, however a signed and dated notation on the original written complaint that it has been withdrawn verbally can be made by the person at the College responsible for managing the complaint (being either the Deputy Principal, the Principal, the Chair or the Board).

The College will notify relevant parties if a complaint is withdrawn.

Anonymous concerns and complaints

The College is committed to dealing with concerns and complaints in accordance with the processes outlined in this policy. The College respects that some people do not feel comfortable putting a name to their grievances and will always investigate concerns and complaints relating to child abuse and reportable conduct to the fullest extent practicable. However, anonymity can make it difficult for the College to effectively resolve concerns and complaints (particularly where the College is being asked to accept an anonymous source's version of events) and is therefore not encouraged.

Vexatious and stale concerns and complaints

The College does not tolerate vexatious concerns and complaints. Stale concerns and complaints that have been previously dealt with by the College will not be revisited in the absence of highly relevant new information coming to light.

The Principal has discretion not to proceed with an appeal if the application is frivolous or vexatious.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality applies with respect to both information relating to the person making the complaint, and, if relevant to a person against whom a complaint is made. The College is committed to maintaining the confidentiality of information throughout the complaints process. Generally, information will be restricted to those who genuinely need to know in order to deal with the complaint or disclosed in order to resolve the complaint.

Personally identifiable information about a complaint will only be made available for the purpose of addressing the complaint and (unless the complainant consents) will be actively protected from disclosure.

Monitoring and review

The College documents, records and monitors concerns and complaints, including:

- Action taken to resolve a concern or complaint, and the relevant outcomes.
- Whether the concern or complaint raises a serious compliance issue, and any action that will be taken by the College to eliminate the associated risks.

Complaints About Child Safety or Concerns
Complaints about or allegations of:

- Breaches of the Child Safety Code of Conduct
- Child abuse, grooming or other harm of a current or former student by
    - Current or former staff members
    - Current or former students
    - Other people on College premises or at College events
- "Reportable conduct" as defined in the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)
- Other child safety related staff misconduct

are managed by the College in a different manner to other complaints.

This is because of the additional confidentiality and privacy requirements surrounding these kinds of matters.

If your complaint is a child safety related complaint, please make your complaint to one of our Child Safety Officers or Principal.

If the Principal is the subject of your complaint, please notify the Chair of the College Board.

For more information about how the College manages child safety related complaints, incidents or concerns involving the College, please refer to our Reporting and Responding to Child Safety Concerns Policy Statement, available on our public website.

Communication

This document is available to the College community and public on the College website.
If you wish to discuss this policy or provide feedback, please email admin@aitkencollege.edu.au.

Revision History

Version	Date	Reviewed/Updated by (name)	Position/Title	Approved by
1	09/01/2019	Josie Crisara Kim Forward	Principal Deputy Principal	Principal
2	06/02/2020	Josie Crisara Kim Forward	Principal Deputy Principal	Principal
3	18/11/2020	Josie Crisara Kim Forward Amy Schembri (together with RK Lawyers)	Principal Deputy Principal Compliance Manager	Principal
3.1	29/03/2021	Josie Crisara College Board	Principal	Principal
4	30/03/2022	Josie Crisara Kim Forward Amy Schembri College Board	Principal Deputy Principal Compliance Manager	Principal
5	01/09/2022	Josie Crisara Amy Schembri		Principal
6	30/03/2023	Josie Crisara College Board	Principal	Principal
7	28/06/2023	Josie Crisara Amy Schembri	Principal Compliance Manager	Principal
8	11/01/2024	Kim Forward Amy Schembri	Deputy Principal Compliance Manager	Deputy Principal
8.1	08/03/2024	Kim Forward	Deputy Principal	College Board
	27/05/2024	College Board		
8.2	06/03/2025	Kim Forward	Deputy Principal	College Board
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9	11/12/2025	Josie Crisara	Principal	Principal
10	11/03/2026	Craig Rodgers	Deputy Principal	College Board