



Complaint management in schools and preschools

This is an extract from the [Complaint management policy](#) that gives an overview of information. Staff must review the full version of the complaint management policy before making a decision or action.

Purpose

We recognise that sometimes things go wrong, and you may feel that your expectations are not being met. If you have an unresolved complaint or would like to provide feedback, we would like to hear from you. It's important to work together, talk, listen and find solutions in a courteous and respectful manner, so we can improve our services.

The Department for Education (department) promotes and values feedback and works to manage complaints in order to improve performance, systems and service delivery. The department is committed to resolving complaints and providing an accessible, student centred transparent, culturally appropriate, trauma informed and fair process to everyone.

All complaints will be taken seriously. When complaints are received, they will be assessed, prioritised, documented and recorded. Resolution will occur at a local level (with the original decision maker or educator) wherever possible and as quickly as possible. Most complaints are resolved quickly, but some complex matters may take more time and if this is the case, we will advise you.

Our procedures are based upon:

Confidentiality

Confidentiality will be maintained at all times. It is essential that all parties involved respect this right and ensure that information remains only with those directly involved in the issue.

Trust

A trusting relationship between all involved is necessary if grievances are to be resolved as effectively as possible.

What is a complaint

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction made to or about the department relating to services, products, employees or the handling of a complaint, where a response or resolution is expected. It's important that the person making the complaint can talk directly to the decision maker if they are not satisfied with a decision. The staff member will make themselves available by phone or arrange a meeting time to talk about the decision and to hear the concerns.

Types of concerns and complaints

You may choose to make a complaint if you believe that the school or preschool has:

- done something incorrect
- failed to do something they should do
- acted unfairly or impolitely.
- Your complaint or feedback may be about:
 - the type, level or quality of service
 - the behaviour and decisions of staff
 - a policy, procedure or practice.

Complaints and feedback may be about something we have to do because of state or federal law. In those cases, we will talk to you and help you understand the requirements and why they exist.



How can I make a complaint?

The best and usually quickest way to resolve a complaint is by raising it at the school or preschool.

Find out more on the department's website:

[feedback and complaints about a school or preschool](#)

[raising a complaint with the department \(PDF 231.8KB\)](#) – sets out step by step process

[tips to make a complaint](#).

The department has a 3-level complaint management process.

Steps for raising your complaint



Level 1 – school or preschool

If a person is not happy with a decision made or action taken by a school or preschool they should first contact the original decision maker or educator involved to discuss the matter and raise their concerns directly. This might be a teacher or leader.

The following guidelines may assist you to resolve your concern with the appropriate person.

Make an appointment with the person concerned. The best way to communicate this is by direct communication, with teachers via Seesaw, email or in person. This allows you to agree to a mutually acceptable time, and allows the person to be prepared for the meeting and to give you their full attention.

Inform them of the topic for discussion.

Please do not enter school classrooms about grievance without prior arrangement or with the expectation that it will be addressed there and then.

Before the meeting:

Reflect upon – What outcomes do I hope for? What will I bring to the meeting?

Write down your thoughts so that your concerns are addressed.

At the meeting:

Clearly define the issue. State your needs.

Listen and discuss possible courses of action and outcomes.

Offer possible solutions, aim for an outcome that works for all involved parties.

If you think the issue is or might be resolved, allow a reasonable timeframe for it to be addressed and feedback to be given.

If you consider that the issue isn't or won't be resolved, state this at the conclusion of the meeting.

After the meeting:

You may decide to monitor the situation before meeting again.

Arrange another meeting with the person concerned.

Decide if you would like to pursue it further.



If you decide to pursue it further:

Make an appointment with a member of the Leadership Team.

Follow the meeting procedure from Step 1.

If you consider that the issue is still unresolved, state this at the conclusion of the meeting.

Another meeting can be arranged and/or you can decide to communicate your complaint to the Department for Education.

Level 2 – central complaint resolution

If a person is not satisfied that their complaint has been addressed at the school or preschool level, including the principal or preschool director (or delegate), they can contact the Customer Feedback Team.

The role of Customer Feedback is to give advice and support about the issues behind a complaint and to confirm if departmental policy and procedure has been followed. Customer Feedback liaise with schools and preschools to help all parties to explore appropriate options for resolution.

Customer Feedback will provide parents and students with information about their options and rights when managing a complaint. They will also seek and connect via the principal or site leader with specialist expertise if needed and or external support options in the context of their concerns.

A complaint or feedback can be lodged to Customer Feedback by using the [online submit a complaint form](#) or by phone (free call) 1800 677 435.

Level 3 – external resolution

If all avenues to resolve the complaint by the department have been exhausted and the matter remains unresolved, a review or advice can be sought through the [Ombudsman SA](#) (OSA). The OSA is an independent body that investigates complaints about SA government. Contact the OSA on (08) 8226 8699. The circumstances of the complaint will influence whether the option of an external review is available.

Unreasonable conduct

Staff safety and wellbeing is vital when dealing with unreasonable conduct at a school or preschool. There's a need to balance the right for someone to make a complaint with the rights of staff safety and respect, and the rights of others to equal time and resources.

There are a number of actions that can be taken by the school or preschool if a person making a complaint is unreasonable.

Unreasonable may include:

- constant phone calls, visits or emails to staff
- swearing, yelling, intimidation or offensive remarks
- making demands to staff on how the complaint should be managed.

Depending on the severity and frequency of the behaviours, actions can range from changing or limiting access to staff, students and school premises through to involving police. Find out more about unreasonable conduct when making a complaint in appendix 4 of the department's [complaint management policy](#).

Our commitment

We know that when we can work together, things can be better. We are committed to a resolution; we have experience in getting things right and we want the opportunity to resolve issues in a fair and timely manner. Be assured, we take customer feedback and complaints seriously.

Supporting information

- Behaviour Support Policy
- Communication Policy