

Grievance Policy

Southern Montessori Education Centre Inc.

Version	Approved By	Date	Maintained By	Next Review
4	Board of Governors	March 2025	Governance	March 2028

Policy Statement

Southern Montessori Education Centre Inc. (Centre) strives to promote responsibility, respect and civility in its day-to-day interactions with students, parents, and staff and is committed to providing a safe and supportive learning and teaching environment.

While conflict is, at times, inevitable and natural, when handled appropriately, conflict can serve as a useful motivator for positive change.

Part of this approach involves a commitment to ensuring the Centre's community has access to processes that allow for conflict to be managed appropriately, promptly and fairly.

This policy describes the Centre's practices for handling grievances. Throughout this document, the term 'parent' has been used to refer to both parents and carers, which includes individuals who have assumed responsibility for the role of primary caregiver for a child or young person, such as guardians, grandparents, or other family members.

It should be noted that in regard to employee grievances, this Policy compliments and is to be read and applied in conjunction with the Dispute Resolution procedure set out in the Southern Montessori Education Centre Inc Enterprise Agreement.

Aim

To ensure that all grievances are dealt with according to these guidelines, that is - rationally, in the strictest confidence, within an atmosphere of mutual respect and genuine goodwill for matters to be resolved both quickly and to the satisfaction of all concerned.

Guiding Principles

When raising a concern or complaint with the Centre, a member of the Centre community can expect to:

- Be treated with courtesy and respect.
- Have the grievance taken seriously, considered impartially and dealt with on its merits.
- Have the grievance dealt with in a confidential and timely manner.
- Be kept informed of the progress and outcome of the grievance resolution process.

In return, the Centre expects that a member of the Centre community who raises a concern or complaint will:

- Treat others (including staff, students and parents) with respect and courtesy.
- Raise grievances in accordance with this policy, and as soon as possible after the event giving rise to the grievance has occurred.
- Provide complete and factual information about the grievance.

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- Ask for assistance or further information as needed.
- Act in good faith to achieve a reasonable outcome.
- Be understanding and accepting of any outcome reached, being mindful that the Centre must sometimes manage the interests of a number of students and other individuals when making decisions and may be privy to confidential information not known to the person raising the grievance.

Mandatory Reporting

Legal obligations relating to child abuse may limit the Centre’s ability to undertake a comprehensive investigation. This particularly applies to the mandatory reporting requirements outlined in the [Children and Young People \(Safety\) Act 2017 \(SA\)](#). South Australia Police (SAPOL) involvement in some investigations may also limit the nature and scope of the Centre’s investigation. In such cases, the Centre will seek guidance from SAPOL as to what can or cannot be done while the police are involved in the matter.

Grievance Resolution Procedure

The Centre acknowledges that grievances tend to be resolved more readily when parents can discuss issues openly with appropriate staff. The Centre strives to actively seek the opinion of parents to help create an open and positive climate.

Our aim is for the prompt resolution of concerns, ideally without there being a need for a formal complaint to be made. As the Board appoints the Principal to manage the day-to-day operations of the Centre, a review by the Board Chair should be the last resort.

Timeframes listed in this policy are only a guide and can vary due to the nature of the grievance and surrounding circumstances. Where timeframes set out in this policy cannot be met, the Centre will strive to communicate with the affected parties about the status of the grievance, and the steps taken (or to be taken) to progress a resolution.

Stage 1 – Raise the concern	
<p>The Centre believes that a concern is often best resolved closest to its source. When a concern relates to a student, the concern should be raised with the relevant classroom teacher in the first instance.</p> <p>However, depending on the nature and severity of an issue, concerns may be raised directly with a senior staff member.</p> <p>The following considerations are relevant prior to and when raising a concern:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly identify the issue or problem prior to contacting the Centre • Consider the practical outcome you are trying to achieve (while being realistic and open to other outcomes and solutions). • If there is more than one issue, write a list so that you are properly prepared. • Consider whether there are any interim measures you would like the Centre to consider whilst the Centre makes enquiries about the issue of problem. • Arrange a mutually convenient time to meet and discuss the grievance in private with the relevant staff member. The best way to do this is to contact Reception admin@southernmontessori.sa.edu.au to arrange a mutually convenient time for a meeting or phone conversation. Please provide Reception with a brief description of the issue you want to speak about. • The issue will, in all probability, be resolved through a calm and frank discussion (in the case of student conflict refer to the Positive Guidance Policy). • Remain courteous and calm when conveying your concerns. The centre is within its rights to stop the discussion if it ceases to be productive. <p>Once a concern is raised, the Centre will record the details including your name and contact details. The Centre’s focus will be on understanding the nature of the problem, the party or parties involved and the nature of any agreeable solutions.</p>	

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Where a mutually agreeable solution is available, this will usually be communicated in writing to you within 3 business days of the outcome being reached.

Where a mutually agreeable solution is not appropriate or possible, the staff member handling the concern will make a decision that best aligns with the Centre's procedures and legal obligations. This will usually be communicated in writing to you within 3 business days of the outcome being reached.

Stage 2 – Make a formal complaint

If you are not satisfied with the way your concern has been handled, you may choose to make a formal complaint to the Principal. If the complaint concerns the Principal, the complaint should be made to the Board Chair.

You may write to the Principal, who will acknowledge receipt as soon as practical, or telephone Reception to arrange a meeting. Reception staff will take your details and confirm a meeting time as soon as is practicable.

The Principal may delegate parts of the complaint-management process, and seek assistance from third parties, however, any ultimate decision will still be made by the Principal.

When the Principal is dealing with a complaint, the Centre's objective is to achieve resolution by:

- Clarifying the substance of the complaint, and the steps taken by the Centre to address the initial concern.
- This may involve the Principal discussing the matter directly with the person the grievance is with and convening a meeting with both parties.
- Communicating with you and relevant parent(s), students (s) and staff, in an attempt to resolve the issue by agreement (where practicable).
- Failing agreement, investigating the complaint and deciding appropriate outcomes in accordance with procedural fairness and natural justice principals.

The Principal will aim to communicate the outcome of a complaint in writing within 15 business days where practicable.

You may request to have someone else present as a support person at a meeting with the Principal or delegate. The support person can be a relative or a friend, but please note the role of a support person is to provide you with support and not to act as an advocate.

The Principal will promptly report any formal complaints, and relevant outcomes, to the Board.

Stage 3 – requesting a review

If you are not satisfied that your complaint has been adequately resolved by the Principal, you may request a review by writing to the Board Chair: president@southernmontessori.sa.edu.au.

Requests for review must be made in writing within 10 business days of the date the Principal communicated the outcome in writing. The grounds for the review, and in particular any concerns you have with the way the relevant complaint was dealt with, must be clearly identified in the request for review.

Please note that in accordance with good governance, the Board entrusts the Principal with the day-to-day management of the Centre, and in particular its staff and students. The Principal is accorded significant discretion regarding such matters.

Accordingly, any review of the Principal's decision under this policy will be confined to the Board Chair deciding whether there is evidence that the Centre's procedures have not been followed, in a way likely to have meaningfully influenced the Principal's decision, or that the Principal unreasonably exercised his or her discretion.

The Board Chair will aim to communicate the outcome of a request for review in writing within 45 business days where practicable.

The Board Chair will promptly report any requests for review, and relevant outcomes, to the Board.

Withdrawal of a Complaint

A complaint can be withdrawn by the person who made the complaint to the Centre at any stage of the resolution process.

Ideally, all grievances should be retracted in writing, however, a dated notation on the Centre's system, stating the complaint has been withdrawn verbally by the appropriate person, can be made.

The Centre will notify affected parties if a complaint is withdrawn, when considered appropriate.

Regardless of a person's wish to withdraw a complaint, grievances that have disciplinary implications for a member of staff may still be followed up by the Centre.

Anonymous Grievances

The Centre is committed to dealing with grievances in accordance with the processes outlined in this policy and treats grievances about the Centre, staff members, students' education or wellbeing with the utmost importance. However, anonymity can make it difficult for the Centre to effectively investigate and resolve complaints. Therefore, it is not encouraged.

Vexatious Grievances

The Centre does not tolerate vexatious concerns and complaints.

Previously Addressed Grievances

Grievances that have been previously addressed by the Centre or externally, or which were not raised by the Centre within a reasonable period of time (having regards to the nature of the relevant grievance) will not be considered in the absence of highly relevant new information and/or evidence coming to light.

Appropriate Confidentiality

The Centre cannot guarantee that communications or documents will be kept confidential. Although we endeavour to deal with grievances with appropriate discretion, we reserve our right to disclose details of the matter to other persons who in our opinion need to know them to facilitate the resolution of the complaint.

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Often it is not possible to keep the information only with the complainant and the staff member(s) who receives the complaint to reach resolution. Generally, the details of the complaint will be disclosed only to people who need to know them, either because they are dealing with the complaint, or are advising about how it should be handled, or are providing information such as witness statements.

In handling complaints, the Centre will distinguish between situations where a legal obligation of confidentiality arises and cases where it does not. The Centre notes that it may be possible to investigate a complaint without naming individuals. However, the source of the complaint may be obvious even if no names are given. Depending on the nature of the complaint and on the circumstances, it may be impractical to undertake an investigation without disclosing the identity of the complainant, the staff member(s) and/or the student concerned.

Any staff member involved in the investigation will be instructed very clearly not to discuss the matter with any other people, including, but not limited to, other staff, students or parents.

The Centre recognises that accusations can potentially be defamatory and can involve risks to those concerned, especially if such accusations are without foundation and reputations are damaged without just cause. All persons involved in grievances or grievance should maintain confidentiality unless otherwise required by appropriate circumstances or law, so as to minimise disruption in the Centre, harm to others and the risk of a civil suit for defamation.

Note: Neither the Minister for Education and Child Development nor the Department for Education and Child Development has any power to directly intervene in any grievances relating to the operations of a non-government school.

Legislative Context

- Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017 (SA)
- Privacy Act 1988
- Education and Children’s Services Act 2019 (SA)
- Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (SA)
- State Government Funding Deed

Supporting Documents

- Child Protection Policy
- Code of Conduct for Staff Policy
- School Community Code of Conduct Policy
- Dealing with Difficult Situations Policy
- Privacy Policy
- Positive Guidance Policy

Document History and Version Control Table			
Version	Date Approved	Approved By	Brief Description
1	2014	Board of Governors	Creation of original document
2	March 2018	Board of Governors	Review ratified at Board
3	August 2021	Board of Governors	Review ratified at Board
4		Board of Governors	Review ratified at Board

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