



Complaints and Grievances Policy

1. PURPOSE

The Hamilton and Alexandra College is a regional, co-educational, independent day and boarding school where every student is known, valued and challenged. Educating students from Early Learning through to Year 12, the school is committed to the safety, wellbeing and participation of all children and young people in an inclusive and secure environment.

The College takes seriously its responsibility to provide a safe educational environment where students are empowered to understand their rights and responsibilities, and to support them to speak up about important and sensitive matters.

The school's approach to handling concerns, grievances and complaints is based on The Hamilton and Alexandra College's values of respect, gratitude, compassion, resilience and optimism.

The Hamilton and Alexandra College is committed to protecting the children and young people in its care. College values the school community and works together with students, parents and staff in an environment of open communication, trust and respect.

The College welcomes feedback from all members of the community and takes all concerns seriously. This policy is designed to assist you to understand our complaints management process.

2. SCOPE

This policy is provided for our community including parents/guardians and students to assist you to understand our complaints handling process.

Implementing the procedural aspects of this policy applies to all College staff, volunteers, contractors and Board members.

This policy applies to all College activities during and outside of College hours. This includes College activities that are occurring on College campus, offsite, online, extracurricular, sport activities and programs, excursions, camps, interstate and overseas travel.

3. WHAT IS A COMPLAINT?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction made to the College, related to our services or operations, or the complaints handling process itself, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected.

4. THE HAMILTON AND ALEXANDRA COLLEGE'S COMMITMENT

The Hamilton and Alexandra College is committed to handling and resolving complaints fairly, effectively and efficiently.

5. PROCEDURAL FAIRNESS PRINCIPLES

The College is committed to ensuring procedural fairness when determining an appropriate resolution to a complaint and will, where possible:

- Respect the right of all parties to be heard and treated fairly;
- Respond to complaints promptly and thoroughly;
- Make sure all parties understand the complaints policy and the process;
- If the complaint is about a person, give that person the opportunity to respond to any allegations;
- Conduct investigations impartially, substantiate the facts of the matter and maintain appropriate records;
- Appropriately communicate the reason for any decision and any action it intends to take;
- Meet privacy and other legal obligations; and
- Record complaints on a secure database with relevant levels of authorised access.

Our program includes the establishment of an online complaints management register which allows us to effectively capture, manage and report on complaints. The regular analysis of complaints received and the implementation of rectification action, where deficiencies are identified, are key to our commitment.

When addressing a complaint, all parties are expected to:

- Be considerate of each other's views and respect each other's role;
- Be resolution focused;
- Act in good faith and cooperation;
- Behave with respect and courtesy;
- Respect the privacy and confidentiality of those involved, as appropriate;
- Operate within and seek reasonable resolutions that comply with any applicable legislation and College policy.

When any parties involved in the complaint do not demonstrate the expected behaviours it may not be possible to reach a resolution.

Vexatious, querulous, frivolous or malicious complaints are governed and managed by alternative processes. To deal with these types of complaints effectively, a customised strategy may be required which does not adhere with this policy. The Principal will determine the plan for the management of these types of complaints.

6. INFORMAL COMPLAINTS RESOLUTION

The vast majority of issues causing concern in schools can be handled quickly and in an informal manner. In most cases these issues can be resolved through informal discussions with appropriate staff members. Even if an issue is able to be resolved informally, all staff are required to log issues through our complaints management register so we are able to identify any systemic issues arising, and take appropriate rectification action.

Students experiencing issues with other students should contact their Mentor/Classroom Teacher or Head of Boarding in the first instance.

If the issues cannot be resolved informally, a more formal process can be instigated by the complainant as identified below.

7. HOW DO I MAKE A FORMAL 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:

- Sending an email to the Principal - principal@hamiltoncollege.vic.edu.au
- Writing a letter to The Hamilton and Alexandra College addressed to the Principal
- If it is about the Principal, it should be sent to the Chair of the Board at rosie.merrin@hamiltoncollege.vic.edu.au

All formal complaints will be logged into our register and managed in accordance with the following procedure.

8. OUR INTERNAL COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCESS

Step 1

All formal complaints are logged through the College's Complaints Register where they are screened by the Principal or, in the case of a complaint directly related to conduct by the Principal or Member of the College Board sent to the Chair of the Board.

Step 2

All valid complaints will be acknowledged in writing as soon as practicable, and always within 10 business days. They will be allocated a status, priority and target resolution date. It is our policy, where possible, to commence an initial investigation and make a preliminary determination within 10 business days of acknowledging the complaint.

Step 3

The Principal or delegate/Chair of the Board or delegate shall conduct an investigation into the issues raised, following principles of procedural fairness, and make a determination. The investigation will establish the circumstances of alleged events and explore options for resolution. Investigations may consist of interviews with involved parties or subject matter experts and/or documentation to determine the full circumstances leading to the complaint. Following completion of the investigation the Principal or Chair of the Board will make a determination.

Step 4

Following the determination, if appropriate, the Principal or Chair of the Board shall formulate a resolution and provide a written response to the complainant. The matter will be closed if this response is accepted.

Step 5

If the initial response is not acceptable the matter will be reviewed internally by the Principal and the College Executive, who may seek additional information or submissions from the relevant parties. The Principal or their delegate will seek to resolve all disputes within 20 business days of the acknowledgement of the complaint. The matter will be closed if the response of the Principal, or their delegate, is accepted. Where appropriate, the matter may be escalated to the Chair of the Board.

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

If the matter remains unresolved, the complainant may pursue external resolution alternatives.

9. ESCALATION

A complaint may be escalated during any stage of the complaints process. If a complaint remains unresolved within timeframes we consider reasonable, it will be escalated, unless agreed otherwise by the parties involved.

Escalation of a complaint may include requesting an alternate staff member to review the complaint or the commencement of a formal investigation.

10. REVIEW OF DECISION

If a formal decision has been made and the complainant is not satisfied with the process and/ or outcome the complainant can request a formal internal or external review. The internal review will independently re-consider all the information available and may conduct its own enquiries and provide a decision on the matter.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied the matter may be escalated to the Board at rosie.merrin@hamiltoncollege.vic.edu.au.

The Principal and Board Chair will consider and participate in avenues such as mediation and may also appoint an independent mediator to assist in this review and process.

The Principal and Board Chair will also provide referrals to counselling and support services dependent on the nature of the complaint and ensure they support the complainants, staff, parents and students wellbeing through the conduct of any investigation and review process.

A complainant can also choose to contact an independent body such as the Victorian Registration and Qualification Authority (VRQA) if they are not satisfied with the outcome of the complaint from the College.

Contact

Manager, Complaints Unit VRQA

03 9637 2806 select option 5

vrqa@education.vic.gov.au

11. CHILD PROTECTION COMMITMENT

We are committed to protecting students in our care. We have zero tolerance for child abuse and are committed to acting in our students' best interest, keeping them safe from harm. All child abuse complaints must be addressed in accordance with the College Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy and Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations (including Mandatory Reporting) Policy and Procedures, child protection laws and reporting obligations. Please report concerns to the Principal at principal@hamiltoncollege.vic.edu.au.

12. FEEDBACK

The Hamilton and Alexandra College also values positive feedback. We welcome you to provide any feedback to principal@hamiltoncollege.vic.edu.au.

13. 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 Hamilton and Alexandra College is committed to maintaining the confidentiality of information throughout the complaints process.

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

Anonymous complaints are accepted. However, if additional information is required to investigate the complaint, the absence of identifying and contact information may mean investigation cannot be undertaken.

14. IMPLEMENTATION

This Complaints and Grievances Policy is available to parents and carers, students and our community who are able to access this policy on the College website, College staff and parent portals or provided on request to any person.

All staff will be made aware of their responsibilities with regard to this policy. Training will be provided to staff on the commencement of their employment and annually on identifying risks and their responsibilities.

15. POLICY BREACH

15.1 Policy Breach

All breaches, near misses and implementation risks related to this policy should be reported to the Business Manager at jbourke@hamiltoncollege.vic.edu.au.

15.2 Policy Compliance monitoring

Compliance with this policy will be monitored by the Principal and Business Manager and this may include independent audits and reviews.

16. RESPONSIBILITIES

Role	Responsibility
Board	The Board is the governing authority of The Hamilton and Alexandra College. The Board is responsible for endorsing this policy, ensuring this policy is reviewed and updated as needed and reviewing the College's compliance with this policy and child safety obligations, and is responsible for confirming this policy is consistent with Board guidelines.
Principal	The Principal is responsible for the College's compliance with this policy.

17. RELEVANT POLICY AND REFERENCES

17.1 The Hamilton and Alexandra College policy and procedure linkage

- Child Safety Code of Conduct
- Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy
- Key definitions and legislation landscape for our Child Protection Program

17.2 Related legislation

The following legislation, standards and regulations apply and this policy aligns with these mandated requirements:

- Ministerial Order 1359;
- Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic); and

- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic).

17.3 Further information

Further information on this policy can be obtained from the Business Manager.

18. APPROVAL

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Endorsed by	The Hamilton and Alexandra College Board
Endorsed on	Draft endorsed 28 th July 2022
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