

# Complaint resolution for schools and corporate – guidelines and procedures

# Contents

<b>1. Summary</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Definitions</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3. Roles and responsibilities</b>	<b>7</b>
3.1. Complainants	7
3.2. Persons the subject of a complaint	7
3.3. All Staff	7
3.4. Complaint managers	7
3.5. Line managers	8
3.6. School Operations	8
3.7. Principals and corporate leaders	9
3.8. Resolution Unit	9
3.9. Chief Executive	10
<b>4. Guidelines</b>	<b>10</b>
4.1. Reporting responsibilities	10
4.2. Accessibility and support	11
4.3. Privacy and confidentiality	11
4.4. Assigning and escalating complaints	12
4.5. Natural justice – procedural fairness	12
4.6. Declining or discontinuing a complaint	12
4.7. Good record keeping	13
4.8. Timeframes	13
<b>5. Procedures</b>	<b>14</b>
5.1. Engage	14
5.1.1. Receive the complaint	14
5.1.2. Is immediate action required?	14
5.1.3. Is it a complaint?	14
5.1.4. Accept or decline the complaint	15
5.1.5. Can the complaint be resolved quickly?	15
5.1.6. Create a complaint record	15
5.1.7. Acknowledge receipt of the complaint	16
5.2. Assess	16
5.2.1. Triage the complaint	16
5.2.2. Assign the complaint	16
5.2.3. Consider individual needs and circumstances	17
5.2.4. Communicate early	17
5.3. Act	17
5.3.1. Make a plan	17
5.3.2. Is a formal investigation required?	18

## Complaint resolution for schools and corporate – guidelines and procedures

5.3.3. Ask for help when needed .....	18
5.3.4. Informing other parties to the complaint.....	18
5.3.5. Communicate often.....	19
5.3.6. Provide a timeframe.....	19
5.3.7. Gather and analyse information .....	19
5.3.8. Develop resolution options .....	20
5.3.9. Provide natural justice – procedural fairness.....	20
5.3.10. Decide the outcome .....	20
5.4. Close .....	21
5.4.1. Quality check.....	21
5.4.2. Communicate the outcome .....	21
5.4.3. Inform complainants of their right to seek a review .....	21
5.4.4. Close the complaint record.....	22
5.4.5. Seek feedback .....	22
5.5. Learn .....	22
5.5.1. Act on recommendations .....	22
5.5.2. Reflect and debrief .....	23
5.5.3. Assess professional learning and development needs.....	23
5.5.4. Look for ways to improve .....	23
5.5.5. Provide feedback.....	23
<b>6. Complaint resolution framework documents and resources .....</b>	<b>24</b>
6.1. Overview infographics .....	24
6.2. Policy, guidelines, and procedures.....	24
6.3. Complainant resources .....	24
6.4. Staff toolkit complaint resolution .....	24
6.5. Staff toolkit managing unreasonable conduct by a complainant.....	24
<b>7. Related legislation and other documents .....</b>	<b>25</b>
7.1. Legislation and regulations.....	25
7.2. Standards and principles.....	25
7.3. Related policy, guidelines and resources.....	25

Read this document with the Complaint resolution policy.

Educators can access supporting resources on the [Policy and advisory library](#) (staff access only).

## 1. Summary

The Northern Territory (NT) Department of Education (the department) is committed to positive partnerships with students, families and our school communities. We welcome feedback and complaints as opportunities to learn, grow and improve.

These guidelines and procedures for effective complaint resolution apply to all NT Government schools and all corporate business units of the department. They provide staff a fair and consistent process for recording and resolving complaints. Staff apply these guidelines in a forward-focused, collaborative and conciliatory way.

All complaints must be managed in line with these guidelines and procedures. If schools or corporate business units have developed their own complaint resolution processes, they must be consistent with these guidelines.

## 2. Definitions

Term	Definition
Alternative dispute resolution	Refers to processes, often led by an independent third party, used to resolve disputes and repair relationships, such as mediation, conciliation and conflict coaching.
Authorising environment	The environment which gives a decision legitimacy and support. Decision-making is based on legislation and other mandates, such as delegation schedules, Treasurer’s Directions, policies, codes and guidelines. All staff need to be aware of, and work within, this environment.
Balance of probabilities	A standard of proof relied upon to make a decision. Balancing probabilities is a holistic approach to decision making. It involves weighing up the relevant information and considering which version of events is more likely than not to have occurred.
Business days	Monday to Friday, excluding public holidays and the end of year mandatory closedown period for the department. All timeframes provided in these guidelines are counted in business days.
Complaint	An expression of dissatisfaction about the department’s programs or services, or about an action or decision by a department staff member, where a response or resolution to the complaint is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required.
Complainant	A person, organisation or their representative who makes a complaint.
Complaint manager	The person responsible for managing a complaint. Any staff member with the necessary skills, knowledge and authority can manage a complaint.
Complaint resolution	The end-to-end process of managing and resolving complaints. Staff capability to resolve complaints is supported by clearly documented complaint resolution policy, guidelines and procedures.
Complaint register	A spreadsheet tool for tracking complaint data. Every school and corporate business unit should track the number and nature of complaints received in

Term	Definition
	their school or corporate business areas and use this data to inform the continuous improvement of their systems and services.
Complaint resolution framework	An overview of the policy, resources, programs and systems developed by the department to drive and support effective complaint resolution.
Complaint support	Support that strengthens the capability of the complaint manager to effectively assess, progress and finalise a complaint. Complaint support is flexible, tailored and responsive to changing or emerging needs of complaint managers.
Confidential	Describes the sensitive nature of a complaint. It means information about a complaint, including information about the existence of the complaint, is only shared with those people who need to know so the complaint can be actioned and resolved.
Conflict of interest	Exists when it appears likely that an employee could be influenced, or where it could be perceived that they are influenced, by a personal interest in carrying out their duty. Conflicts of interests may be perceived, potential or actual, read the <a href="#">Conflict of interest – policy</a> .
Corporate business unit	Corporate business areas within the department that are not within a school.
Corporate leader	All corporate staff at director level or above.
Date of receipt	The date the department first receives the complaint. The date of receipt does not change. It is not the date a complaint is referred to a particular person, school or business unit for action.
Debriefing	Means talking things through after a difficult or stressful incident. It can be a formal or informal process, depending on the needs of the staff member. Debriefing also allows staff to reflect on what went well, what could have gone better, and what could be done differently next time.
Escalation	The transfer of responsibility for managing a complaint, or issues arising from a complaint, in part or in full, to a more senior person with relevant oversight or management responsibilities.
External resolution	Resolution of complaints referred to the department by an external complaint or review body.
In writing	A written record is created. Email is the preferred method of written communication with all parties to a complaint. Where communication in writing is not appropriate, department staff must still make a written record of the communication with complainants via other channels.
Internal review	An impartial examination of whether the original complaint resolution process was fair, and the outcome reached reasonable in the circumstances.
Investigation	The formal and systematic process of inquiry and evidence gathering. Investigations are undertaken to gather admissible evidence for any subsequent action, whether criminal, civil, disciplinary, or other administrative action.
Line manager	Line managers oversee the quality and efficiency of the work performed by members of their team while reporting back to a higher-level manager. Line managers are responsible for providing guidance and support to staff

Term	Definition
	managing complaints and facilitating escalation or reassignment of complaints when necessary.
Local resolution	Resolving complaints as close to the point of service or the original decision maker as possible.
Natural justice – procedural fairness	Principles and procedures used to promote fair and proper decision making.
Positive risk culture	Encourages staff to deal with complaints as close to the point of service or the original decision maker as possible. Decisions are made at the appropriate level, with clear processes for staff to seek advice and support, or to escalate complaints when required.
Resolution	The end of the complaint life cycle. The resolution, or outcome of the complaint, may not always be to the satisfaction of all parties.
School Representative Body	School representative bodies are the mechanism providing for parent and community engagement in school governance. Through the school governance function, SRBs act as the conduit between the principal and the broader school community for consideration of strategic and whole school issues.
Staff	Both school based and corporate staff of the department.
Subject of a complaint	Person about whom a complaint has been made.
Support person	Any person involved in a complaint may have a support person to provide practical and emotional support at any time in the complaint resolution process. A support person could include a parent or carer, a union representative, work colleague, trusted friend, a community member or a person from a support or advocacy agency.
Triage	An initial assessment, early in the resolution process, to establish priorities and determine who is best placed to take responsibility for managing the complaint.
Unreasonable complainant conduct	Any action or behaviour by a complainant which, because of its nature or frequency, raises substantial health, safety, resource or equity issues for the department, its staff, other service users or the complainant themselves.
Vulnerable person	Any person who is especially susceptible to detriment due to circumstances including disability, age, literacy levels, gender, trauma and stress.

## 3. Roles and responsibilities

### 3.1. Complainants

Complainants are responsible for:

- being honest, respectful, and cooperative toward the complaint manager and other department staff
- providing a clear idea of the problem and the desired solution
- providing staff with all available information relevant to their complaint
- understanding that we resolve complaints in line with the department's values, policies and the law
- understanding that complex complaints can take time to assess and resolve
- understanding that some decisions cannot be overturned or changed using the complaint process
- informing the department of changes affecting the complaint, including if help is no longer required
- if dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint, requesting an internal review within 20 business days of receiving the outcome.

### 3.2. Persons the subject of a complaint

Persons the subject of a complaint are responsible for:

- cooperating with the complaint manager and providing them with all relevant information in their possession
- being honest and respectful in their communications with the complaint manager and other department staff
- avoiding any reprisal or perception of reprisal against the complainant.

### 3.3. All Staff

All staff are responsible for:

- meeting mandatory reporting obligations
- treating all people with respect, including complainants
- familiarising themselves with the complaint resolution policy and guidelines
- assisting people who wish to make a complaint
- receiving complaints in line with the complaint resolution policy and guidelines
- treating complaints confidentially
- participating in complaint resolution training and awareness activities.

### 3.4. Complaint managers

Complaint managers are also responsible for:

- having regard to the rights and responsibilities of all parties to the complaint

- acting within their authority to make decisions on a complaint as set out in their school or corporate business unit's operational procedures
- taking all reasonable steps to prevent reprisal or perception of reprisal against complainants
- seeking expert advice and support or escalating complaints when required
- referring any complaint, or part of a complaint, that raises serious concerns about the performance or conduct of a department employee to the relevant delegate for appropriate action
- taking appropriate action on complaint outcomes.

### 3.5. Line managers

Line managers, within their area of responsibility, are also responsible for:

- empowering and supporting staff to receive and resolve complaints quickly and as close to the point of service or original decision maker as possible
- ensuring all staff understand their mandatory reporting obligations
- ensuring complaint managers resolve complaints in line with the complaint resolution policy, guidelines and procedures
- ensuring complaint managers understand the extent of their authority to make decisions on a complaint, as set out in their school or corporate business unit's operational procedures
- providing guidance, support and oversight of staff managing complaints
- providing support to persons the subject of a complaint who are under their management
- ensuring staff participate in complaint resolution training and awareness activities
- ensuring all staff take all reasonable steps to prevent reprisal or the perception of reprisal against complainants
- supporting timely escalation of complaints when required
- referring any complaint, or part of a complaint, that raises serious concerns about the performance or conduct of a department employee to the relevant delegate for appropriate action
- ensuring the accuracy and completeness of the complaint data reported to the department
- analysing feedback and complaint data to identify opportunities to improve performance, systems and service standards
- briefing relevant corporate leaders about significant complaints and systemic issues identified through complaints.

### 3.6. School Operations

School Operations is also responsible for:

- promoting and supporting the application of the complaint resolution policy and guidelines in schools
- providing information, advice and support to staff managing complaints
- resolving complex complaints escalated from schools
- seeking further information, support or expert advice as required



- referring any complaint, or part of a complaint, that raises serious concerns about the performance or conduct of a department employee to the relevant delegate for appropriate action
- ensuring the accuracy and completeness of their complaint data
- analysing feedback and complaint data to identify opportunities to improve performance, systems and service standards
- briefing relevant corporate leaders about significant complaints and systemic issues identified through complaints
- embedding complaint resolution in School Operations' business planning, training, and quality assurance activities.

### 3.7. Principals and corporate leaders

Principals and corporate leaders, in addition to line manager responsibilities, are also responsible for:

- ensuring the effective implementation and operation of the complaint resolution policy and guidelines in their school or corporate business unit
- ensuring operating procedures and administrative processes, including decision making protocols, are established and communicated to relevant staff
- supporting staff participation in complaint resolution training and awareness activities
- ensuring information about how to make a complaint is visible and accessible in schools and public facing corporate business areas
- ensuring that any complaint, or part of a complaint, that raises serious concerns about the performance or conduct of a department employee is referred to the employee's line manager for appropriate action
- analysing feedback and complaint data to identify opportunities to improve performance, systems and service standards
- embedding complaint resolution in business planning, training and quality assurance activities
- ensuring there is a process for timely briefing of senior management about serious complaints and systemic issues arising
- identifying and allocating resources needed for effective and efficient complaint resolution.

### 3.8. Resolution Unit

The Resolution Unit is responsible for:

- developing, promoting, and maintaining an effective and accessible complaint resolution framework
- providing information, advice and support to staff managing complex or escalated complaints
- referring any complaint, or part of a complaint, that raises serious concerns about the performance or conduct of a department employee to the relevant line manager for appropriate action
- coordinating and conducting internal reviews
- case managing complaints referred from external complaint or review bodies
- developing and delivering staff capability lifting programs and initiatives
- developing and delivering a secure IT solution for recording, managing and reporting complaints

- analysing feedback and complaint data to inform the department’s continuous improvement agenda
- reporting to chief and senior executive on the operation and effectiveness of the complaint resolution framework.

### 3.9. Chief Executive

The Chief Executive is responsible for:

- creating a culture that values feedback and complaints
- ensuring an effective and accessible complaint resolution framework is established
- promoting awareness of the framework across the department
- ensuring a secure case management IT solution for complaints is established
- ensuring feedback and complaint data is used to improve the department’s performance, systems, and services.

## 4. Guidelines

### 4.1. Reporting responsibilities

A complaint may raise issues that require immediate action, including making a report to another branch, division, department, or agency.

All staff must:

- understand their reporting obligations and the process for making reports under relevant legislation, directives, and policies
- seek immediate advice from their line manager or other senior person if they are unsure whether an issue of complaint requires immediate action.

Quick links	
To report	Go to
Harm or abuse of a child or young person	<a href="#">Mandatory reporting of harm and exploitation of children guidelines</a> or call the child protection hotline on 1800 700 250
Improper conduct of public officers or bodies	<a href="#">Mandatory reporting directions and guidelines</a> of the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption. Call 1800 250 918 or email <a href="mailto:report.submission@icac.nt.gov.au">report.submission@icac.nt.gov.au</a>
An approved early childhood education and care service or provider	Serious incidents and some complaints about possible breaches of the <i>Education and Care Service (National Uniform Legislation) Act 2011</i> require mandatory notification to <a href="#">Quality Education and Care Northern Territory (QECNT)</a> within 24 hours. See the Notification Decision Tool or call QECNT on 08 8999 3561 or <a href="mailto:qualityecnt.det.@education.nt.gov.au">qualityecnt.det.@education.nt.gov.au</a>
Suspected fraud	<a href="#">Fraud control policy and procedure</a>

Quick links	
Criminal behaviour	NT Police on 131 444 or Crime Stoppers on 1800 333 000
Teacher misconduct	<a href="#">Allegations of sexual misconduct policy</a> and <a href="#">Report alleged misconduct of a teacher</a>
Sexual behaviour in children	<a href="#">Sexual behaviour in children guidelines</a> provide guidance on discerning and responding to harmful or concerning sexual behaviour in children and young people
Work health and safety incidents	<a href="#">Safety responsibilities, reporting and review guidelines</a>

## 4.2. Accessibility and support

Information about how to make a complaint must be readily available and easily accessible to all members of the school community. Staff must seek to understand the individual needs and circumstances of all parties to a complaint and how this may impact their ability to participate in the complaint resolution process.

Schools and corporate business areas must:

- display a Feedback Charter in high traffic areas, available on the Policy and Advisory Library
- make use of the [Speak up and make a complaint](#) resources produced by the National Office of Child Safe Organisations to encourage children and students to speak up when they feel unsafe, unhappy or unfairly treated.
- use the Complaint record form provided in the staff toolkit to record a complaint.

Complaint managers must:

- ensure the Complaint record form provided in the staff toolkit is used to record a complaint
- provide or facilitate support to complainants who require assistance to participate in complaint resolution, including use of a support person or advocate
- identify and address any barriers to effective communication with complainants
- use [interpreting and translating services](#), including [Aboriginal interpreter services](#) when required.

## 4.3. Privacy and confidentiality

Privacy and confidentiality are important for people coming forward with a complaint.

Schools and corporate business areas must:

- keep information obtained as part of a complaint process confidential and protect the privacy of the parties to the complaint. Read the [Information privacy policy](#).
- share information when required to meet reporting obligations or legislative requirements, for example, when there is a risk of harm or exploitation of children. Read about [Information sharing](#).

Privacy considerations may also affect the information the department can share with the complainant about the action taken on a complaint.

## 4.4. Assigning and escalating complaints

All complaints undergo early assessment, or triage, for the purposes of determining its priority and deciding who will have responsibility for managing the complaint.

Effective triage requires consideration of:

- the nature and extent of the issues of complaint
- the individual needs and circumstances of the people involved
- the context of the complaint
- the capability and capacity of available staff to effectively manage the complaint.

The characteristics of a complaint will guide decision making about how the complaint will be managed.

Read the Assigning and escalating complaints guide in the Policy and Advisory Library.

Principals and corporate leaders, or their nominated staff, must:

- carefully consider the characteristics of a complaint
- assign the complaint to a complaint manager with the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to effectively manage the complaint
- ensure the complaint manager understands escalation pathways should escalation be required.

## 4.5. Natural justice – procedural fairness

The principles of natural justice, sometimes referred to as procedural fairness, require that a person who may be negatively affected by a proposed decision is provided a right of reply before a final decision is made.

This means that:

- the person must be informed of any adverse information and other relevant information that may be considered by the decision maker
- the person must be given a reasonable opportunity to respond and provide further information
- the decision maker must impartially consider any submissions or further information received prior to making a final decision
- a decision maker must not have a personal interest in the outcome of a decision, and he or she must make the decision in a fair and considered manner.

To learn more, read the [Good decision-making guide](#).

## 4.6. Declining or discontinuing a complaint

The department may decline to accept a complaint in certain circumstances. A complaint may be declined if the complaint:

- is outside the scope of the complaint resolution policy
- does not contain enough information to allow for assessment

- lacks substance, credibility or is not made in good faith
- is made by a person assessed as having an insufficient interest in the matter
- is made by a person who became aware of the circumstances giving rise to the complaint more than 12 months ago
- has been the subject of a previous complaint to the department
- is being, or has been, internally reviewed by the department
- is being, or has been, reviewed by an external body, for example the Ombudsman’s Office
- is abusive, threatening or in some other way unreasonable.

An accepted complaint may be discontinued, and no further action taken, if:

- the complainant withdraws the complaint
- there has been insufficient contact from the complainant, after reasonable enquiries, to assess the complaint
- further assessment of the complaint is considered unnecessary, unjustified, or an inappropriate use of public resources
- the complainant engages in unreasonable conduct and strategies employed to manage the unreasonable conduct are not effective.

## 4.7. Good record keeping

It is a requirement of the NT public sector [Code of conduct](#) that all staff take reasonable steps to ensure that information and knowledge relied upon to make decisions or take actions is evidence based, transparent, correct, and current.

Principals and corporate leaders must:

- ensure the Complaint record form provided in the staff toolkit is used to record a complaint
- ensure complaint records are maintained in a confidential and secure location
- ensure records contain sufficient detail to support complaint case management continuity in the event the complaint is reassigned, referred, escalated or reviewed
- ensure complaint documentation complies with the Information privacy principles as detailed in Schedule 2 of the [Information Act 2002](#), the relevant [General disposal schedules](#), [NTG records management standards](#) and any other legal requirements for the collection, storage and use of information.

## 4.8. Timeframes

All timeframes in the Complaint resolution framework are measured in business days. Business days are Monday to Friday, except public holidays and mandatory closedown dates for the department.

Date of receipt is the date the complaint was first received by the department; it is not the date the complaint is received by a particular person, school, or corporate business unit.

Activity	Business days
Consider – is immediate action required?	On receipt
Acknowledge the complaint in writing	Within 3 days of receipt
Contact the complainant	As soon as practicable, but must be within 10 days of receipt
Provide updates	Often, but no less than every 10 days
Finalise the complaint	Within 30 days of receipt
Communicate the outcome	As soon as practicable, but must be within 10 days of date of outcome decision
Feedback request from the parties	10 days after providing notice of the outcome to the parties
Requests for internal review	Within 20 days of receiving notice of the complaint outcome
Provide complaint data to the Resolution Unit	Within 10 days of the end of each school semester

## 5. Procedures

Complaint resolution follows a five-stage process as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Five stage process for resolving complaints.**



### 5.1. Engage

#### 5.1.1. Receive the complaint

A complaint can be made in person, by phone, in writing, by email, or online via the complaint portal on the department’s website. Any member of staff can receive a complaint.

#### 5.1.2. Is immediate action required?

Some complaints may raise concerns that require immediate action, refer to section 4.1 of these guidelines – [Reporting responsibilities](#).

#### 5.1.3. Is it a complaint?

Sometimes issues raised are not complaints. Action is still required, but the complaint resolution process may not apply. It is not a complaint when a person:

- requests information
- requests a change in services or requests a new service
- requests information or an explanation of policies, procedures, or decisions
- suggests an improvement to the department’s services

- expresses a concern about a situation
- provides feedback on the department's performance including opinions, suggestions, comments, and expressions of interest or concern
- provides information, for example reporting an incident.

If it is unclear whether it is a complaint, clarify the expectations of the person raising concerns.

#### 5.1.4. Accept or decline the complaint

While the department welcomes feedback and complaints, not all complaints will be accepted for further assessment. For further information, refer to section 4.6 of these guidelines – [Declining or discontinuing a complaint](#).

Complaint managers must:

- explain the reasons for declining to accept a complaint to the complainant
- provide information about other complaint options. Use the Where else can I make my complaint quick guide on the Policy advisory library
- support and when required facilitate referral of the complainant to another complaint body
- close all discontinued complaints in line with section 5.4 of these guidelines – [Close](#).

#### 5.1.5. Can the complaint be resolved quickly?

All staff are empowered to resolve complaints and most complaints can be resolved quickly and simply at the first point of contact. Early resolution is often achieved by:

- listening with care to the complainant's concerns
- providing an explanation or reason for an action or decision
- providing information or advice
- clarifying a misunderstanding
- acknowledging a mistake, oversight, or omission
- offering a remedy or apology
- providing a response to previous correspondence or returning a phone call
- amending errors in records or other written information
- offering to raise a system or service issue with the relevant team.

#### 5.1.6. Create a complaint record

Every complaint must be recorded, regardless of how it was received or how quickly it is resolved.

Staff and complaint managers must:

- ensure all complaints are well documented
- ensure the complaint record is confidential and stored in a secure location
- use the Complaint record form provided in the staff toolkit.

### 5.1.7. Acknowledge receipt of the complaint

Staff and complaint managers must:

- acknowledge complaints in writing within three business days of receipt.

Written acknowledgement of receipt of a complaint must include:

- advice that the complaint process is confidential, within the limits of the law, and will be conducted within the limits of the department's Privacy policy
- a copy of the Your complaint's journey brochure
- if it is not yet clear who will have responsibility for managing the complaint, an assurance that a complaint manager will contact the complainant in a timely manner to talk to them about their complaint and how it will be managed
- a copy of the Individual rights and mutual responsibilities in complaint resolution information sheet.

Use the Acknowledgment of complaint email template on the Policy and advisory library.

## 5.2. Assess

### 5.2.1. Triage the complaint

Principals and corporate leaders must establish procedures in their school or business areas for the receipt and triage of complaints.

Complaints must be triaged to establish the priority to be given to the complaint and to decide who is best placed to manage the complaint. Early assessment of the complaint involves consideration of:

- the nature and extent of the issues raised
- the complexity, sensitivity or risk associated with the complaint
- the individual needs and circumstances of the parties to the complaint
- any perceived, potential, or actual conflicts of interest
- who needs to be notified or briefed about the complaint
- does the school or corporate business area that received the complaint have the capability and capacity to respond effectively
- stakeholders who may need to be involved or informed
- whether expert advice or formal investigation is likely to be required.

### 5.2.2. Assign the complaint

Principals and corporate leaders must ensure that complaints are assigned to a complaint manager.

The complaint manager is the person responsible for ensuring the complaint is managed effectively and efficiently, and in line with the department's complaint resolution policy, guidelines and procedures.

In many cases, staff can resolve a complaint made directly to them, even if the complaint relates to their own actions. In schools, the classroom or subject teacher is often the best person to handle complaints about matters within their classroom or area of responsibility.



More complex or serious complaints may need to be assigned to a more senior or experienced person.

Complaints about principals or corporate leaders should be referred to the person's line manager for appropriate action.

Read the Assigning and escalating complaints guide on the Policy and advisory library.

### 5.2.3. Consider individual needs and circumstances

Some complainants may need additional help or a different approach to participate in the complaint resolution process.

Complaint managers must:

- consider the individual needs and circumstances of the complainant
- take steps to understand and respond to any identified support needs
- establish communication preferences
- clearly document complainant supports and communication preference in the complaint record.

Learn more in section 4.2 of these guidelines – [Accessibility and support](#)Accessibility and support.

### 5.2.4. Communicate early

Complaint managers should:

- contact the complainant within 10 days of the department receiving the complaint
- listen with care and seek to understand the complainant's concerns
- invite the complainant to provide further information they consider relevant
- check the complainant's understanding of information provided about individual rights and mutual responsibilities of the parties to a complaint
- clarify the complainant's desired outcomes and manage expectations
- provide information about the complaint process and estimated timeframes
- explore alternative dispute resolution options such as case conferencing, mediation or conflict coaching, if appropriate to do so
- provide the complainant with the complaint manager's contact details.

## 5.3. Act

### 5.3.1. Make a plan

Complaint managers should plan their approach to complaint resolution and give consideration to:

- all issues of complaint
- what can reasonably be addressed
- how identified risks will be managed
- the actions already taken to resolve the complaint

- the authorising environment, that is, the legislation, standards, policies, guidelines, procedures, or other directives relevant to the issues of complaint
- possible sources of information, such as: documents, electronic records, witness accounts, emails and texts, or CCTV footage
- the research or other lines of inquiry that may inform resolution, such as seeking subject matter expertise or expert opinion or advice
- how to engage with identified stakeholders
- the mode and frequency of communication with the parties.

Use the Complaint assessment plan template provided in the staff toolkit on the Policy advisory library.

### 5.3.2. Is a formal investigation required?

A small number of complaints will require formal investigation, such as allegations of a serious breach of legislation or other directive and there is a requirement to gather admissible evidence for any subsequent action, for example, disciplinary action.

A decision to investigate is an objective assessment of the substance of the complaint and is not influenced by the behaviour or demands of a party to the complaint.

Principals and corporate leaders must:

- decide if a formal investigation is needed
- ensure formal investigations are conducted by an independent and suitably qualified and experienced person
- seek information and advice about the formal investigation process from their line manager, School Operations or the Resolution Unit if needed.

### 5.3.3. Ask for help when needed

A positive risk culture encourages collaboration on complaints when further information, expertise or experience is needed.

Complaint managers should consult with their line manager about uncertainties or concerns as they arise.

Line managers and School Operations provide guidance and support to complaint managers as required.

### 5.3.4. Informing other parties to the complaint

A person the subject of a complaint may be invited to provide a response. The opportunity to give their side of the story is a necessary part of procedural fairness. There may be some circumstances, however, where it is not necessary to engage with them; for example, when a complaint is assessed as lacking substance, or the matter is being dealt with elsewhere.

Complaint managers must:

- take all reasonable steps to prevent reprisals against the complainant. If necessary, a summary of the complaint can be made to avoid providing identifying information. Original documents and the identity of confidential sources do not have to be provided
- take appropriate action to inform line managers of serious concerns about an employee's performance or conduct.

Line managers must:

- provide staff involved in a complaint process with information about additional support and [employee assistance programs](#) as required
- take appropriate action when serious issues of employee conduct or performance arise from a complaint.

### 5.3.5. Communicate often

Open and frequent communication is central to the service experience of all parties to a complaint.

Complaint managers must:

- update a complainant on the progress of a complaint on a regular basis and at least every 10 business days
- when appropriate to do so, keep other parties updated on progress of the complaint.

### 5.3.6. Provide a timeframe

The department aims to resolve complaints within 30 business days of receipt. However, some complex complaints may take longer to resolve. Timeframes may also be impacted by school holiday periods, availability of staff and other workplace priorities.

Complaint managers must:

- aim to resolve the complaint within 30 business days
- provide complainants with the reasons for any delays should they occur and provide a revised timeframe for completion.

### 5.3.7. Gather and analyse information

Complaint managers may access department records to follow logical lines of inquiry.

All staff must:

- promptly cooperate with reasonable requests for information from complaint managers
- seek immediate advice from their line manager if they are unsure about what information can be accessed by, or shared with, a complaint manager.

### 5.3.8. Develop resolution options

The complaint manager analyses the information gathered to develop resolution options, taking into consideration:

- the known facts
- the issues that remain in dispute
- the weight to be given to relevant factors
- the factors that are irrelevant and should not be considered
- what conclusions can be drawn based on the balance of probabilities, that is, which version of events is more likely than not to have occurred, based on the available information
- the options for resolving the complaint, considering the reasonable outcomes sought by the complainant
- the stakeholders to be engaged to assist in developing resolution options
- whether the proposed resolution options and outcomes being considered are proportionate to the issues at hand.

### 5.3.9. Provide natural justice – procedural fairness

If the rights or interests of a person may be negatively affected by the outcome of a complaint, that person must be afforded a right of reply before a final decision is made. Natural justice helps ensure the complaint resolution process and its outcomes are fair and reasonable in the circumstances.

Learn more in section 4.5 of these guidelines – [Natural justice – procedural fairness](#).

### 5.3.10. Decide the outcome

Principals and corporate leaders must establish who within their school or corporate business areas has the authority to decide outcomes and finalise complaints.

Outcomes of a complaint may include:

- providing further information or advice
- providing an explanation or more detailed reasons for a decision or action taken or not taken
- an apology
- mediation or other alternative dispute resolution process
- changes to a work practice or service provided by the department
- a review of programs, policies, guidelines, or procedures
- professional development initiatives
- referral for appropriate action to a relevant delegate
- remedial and other improvement action.

Note: The resolution, or outcome, of a complaint may not always be to the satisfaction of all parties.

## 5.4. Close

### 5.4.1. Quality check

Before finalising the complaint, the complaint manager must be satisfied that:

- the department's legislative and reporting obligations have been met
- the complaint process complied with the complaint resolution policy, guidelines, and procedures
- the outcome of the complaint was communicated in writing
- an adequate record has been made of the complaint resolution process and its outcomes.

### 5.4.2. Communicate the outcome

Complaint managers must:

- inform the complainant in writing of the outcome of the complaint within ten business days of the outcome being decided
- communicate the outcome of the complaint with other parties, when appropriate to do so
- have regard to the department's [Information privacy policy](#) when deciding the information to be provided to parties to a complaint.

When appropriate to do so, complaint managers should communicate directly with complainants and verbally foreshadow outcomes ahead of providing the outcome in writing.

Outcome letters should:

- summarise the issues of complaint
- explain the steps taken to action the complaint
- state the outcome of the resolution process
- provide reasons for the outcome decision
- detail the information taken into consideration in reaching the decision
- if appropriate to do so, include supporting documentation relied upon to make the decision, such as relevant legislation, policy, or other material
- if appropriate to do so, provide details of any recommendations for further action
- provide information about the complainant's right of review.

### 5.4.3. Inform complainants of their right to seek a review

If a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint, or the way the complaint was handled, they can ask the department to undertake an internal review.

Requests for internal review must be made within 20 business days of the complainant being informed in writing of the complaint outcome.

All requests for internal review must be sent to the Resolution Unit by emailing [resolution.doe@education.nt.gov.au](mailto:resolution.doe@education.nt.gov.au).

Complaint managers must ensure outcome letters to complainants include information about:

- the complainant's right to ask the department for an internal review of their complaint
- how to request an internal review
- the timeframe within which the request for an internal review must be made.

All requests for an internal review will be managed in accordance with the Internal review guidelines and procedures.

Use the Complaint outcome email template on the Policy and advisory library.

#### 5.4.4. Close the complaint record

Complaint managers must:

- update and close the complaint record
- ensure the complaint record is kept confidential and securely stored.

Principals and corporate leaders should:

- track the complaints received in their school or corporate business area using the complaint register provided in the staff toolkit on the Policy advisory library.

#### 5.4.5. Seek feedback

Complaint managers must:

- request feedback from the parties about their complaint experience, unless there is good reason not to, for example, if action has been required to manage unreasonable conduct
- seek feedback through channels suited to the individual needs and circumstances of the parties
- enter feedback received into the complaint record
- refer feedback to the appropriate person or business area for further action if this is required.

### 5.5. Learn

#### 5.5.1. Act on recommendations

Complaint managers must:

- ensure appropriate action is taken to manage complaint outcomes, including recommendations for further action
- ensure that recommendations that relate to whole of school or broader systemic issues are referred or escalated to the appropriate person for further action
- document the action taken to refer or escalate complaint outcomes or recommendations.

### 5.5.2. Reflect and debrief

Debriefing can be formal or informal, depending on the experience of the staff member. It provides staff the opportunity to reflect on what went well, what could have gone better, and what could be done differently next time.

Line managers must:

- offer debriefing to all staff involved in a complaint resolution process
- provide staff with information about additional support and employee assistance programs as required.

### 5.5.3. Assess professional learning and development needs

Line managers should:

- consider the learning and development needs of staff involved in complaint resolution
- support staff to build capability in complaint resolution.

### 5.5.4. Look for ways to improve

Principals and corporate leaders should:

- proactively review complaint data to identify opportunities to improve performance, systems, and service standards within their areas of responsibility
- refer any systemic issues that arise from a complaint or a group of complaints to the appropriate person or business area for a broader agency response.

### 5.5.5. Provide feedback

All staff are encouraged to provide feedback on the operation of the complaint resolution policy, guidelines and procedures. Feedback can be provided to the Resolution Unit at [resolution.doe@education.nt.gov.au](mailto:resolution.doe@education.nt.gov.au).

## 6. Complaint resolution framework documents and resources

Policy, guidelines and supporting resources are available to educators on the Policy and advisory library (staff access only)

### 6.1. Overview infographics

- Complaint resolution framework placemat
- Effective complaint resolution process flowchart
- Feedback charter poster

### 6.2. Policy, guidelines, and procedures

- Complaint resolution policy
- Complaint resolution guidelines and procedures for schools and corporate
- Internal review of complaints guidelines and procedures
- Managing unreasonable conduct by a complainant guidelines and procedures

### 6.3. Complainant resources

- Individual rights and mutual responsibilities - information sheet
- 'Your complaint's journey' – leaflet
- 'Where else can I make my complaint?' – information sheet

### 6.4. Staff toolkit complaint resolution

- Complaint record form
- Complaint register template
- Assigning and escalating complaints information sheet
- Acknowledgement of complaint email template
- Complaint closure letter template

### 6.5. Staff toolkit managing unreasonable conduct by a complainant

- Managing unreasonable conduct by a complainant – scripts and strategies
- Unreasonable conduct incident form
- Managing unreasonable conduct process and decision-making checklist
- Restrict access to services warning letter email template
- Restrict access to services decision letter email template



## 7. Related legislation and other documents

### 7.1. Legislation and regulations

- *Information Act 2002* – <https://legislation.nt.gov.au/en/Legislation/information-act-2002>
- *Independent Commissioner Against Corruption Act 2017* – <https://legislation.nt.gov.au/Legislation/independent-commissioner-against-corruption-act-2017>
- *Ombudsman Act 2009* – <https://legislation.nt.gov.au/en/Legislation/ombudsman-act-2009>
- *PSEMA Employment Instruction 3 – Natural Justice* – [https://ocpe.nt.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/245094/EI\\_3 - Commissioners Guideline - Natural Justice.pdf](https://ocpe.nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/245094/EI_3_-_Commissioners_Guideline_-_Natural_Justice.pdf)
- *Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Act 2004* – <https://legislation.nt.gov.au/en/Legislation/teacher-registration-northern-territory-act-2004>
- *Work Health and Safety (National Uniform Legislation) Act 2011* – <https://legislation.nt.gov.au/Legislation/work-health-and-safety-national-uniform-legislation-act-2011>

### 7.2. Standards and principles

- Standards Australia Guidelines for complaint management in organisations AS 10002:2022 – [https://infostore.saiglobal.com/en-au/standards/as-10002-2022-111525\\_saig\\_as\\_as\\_3124267/](https://infostore.saiglobal.com/en-au/standards/as-10002-2022-111525_saig_as_as_3124267/)
- National Principles for Child Safe Organisations – <https://childsafeforhumanrights.gov.au/national-principles>

### 7.3. Related policy, guidelines and resources

- Aboriginal Interpreter Service – <https://cmc.nt.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs/aboriginal-interpreter-service>
- Allegations of sexual misconduct policy – <https://elearn.ntschoools.net/policies/5230>
- Code of conduct for education sites and workplace participants policy – <https://education.nt.gov.au/policies/conduct>
- Conflict of interest policy – <https://education.nt.gov.au/policies/conduct>
- Employee Assistance Program – <https://www.teachintheterritory.nt.gov.au/educator-support/educator-wellbeing/employee-assistance-program-eap>
- Fraud control policy and procedure – <https://elearn.ntschoools.net/policies/5291>
- General records disposal schedules – <https://tfhc.nt.gov.au/heritage-libraries-and-archives/library-and-archives-nt/government-recordkeeping/general-records-disposal-schedules>
- Good decision making guide – <https://elearn.ntschoools.net/pal/delegations#resources15957>
- Information privacy policy – <https://education.nt.gov.au/policies/conduct#privacy-policy>
- Information sharing guidelines – <http://ed.ntschoools.net/infotech/foi/Documents/When-can-I-share-information%20-%20OIC%20poster.pdf>

## Complaint resolution for schools and corporate – guidelines and procedures

- Interpreting and Translating Service NT – [https://nt.gov.au/community/interpreting-and-translating-services/interpreting-and-translating-service-nt?SQ\\_VARIATION\\_183468=0](https://nt.gov.au/community/interpreting-and-translating-services/interpreting-and-translating-service-nt?SQ_VARIATION_183468=0)
- Mandatory reporting of harm and exploitation of children guidelines – [https://education.nt.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/1077939/mandatory-reporting-harm-exploitation-children-guidelines.pdf](https://education.nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/1077939/mandatory-reporting-harm-exploitation-children-guidelines.pdf)
- Mandatory reporting directions and guidelines – <https://icac.nt.gov.au/publications/directions-guidelines-and-strategies>
- Quality Education and Care Northern Territory Notification Decision Tool – <https://education.nt.gov.au/committees-regulators-and-advisory-groups/quality-education-and-care-nt>
- Records and information management standards – <https://dcdd.nt.gov.au/government-records/records-information-management-standards>
- Reporting alleged misconduct of a teacher – <https://elearn.ntschoools.net/policies/5342>
- Risk management framework – <https://elearn.ntschoools.net/policies/4123>
- Safety responsibilities, reporting and review guidelines - <https://elearn.ntschoools.net/policies/4452>
- Sexual behaviour in children guidelines – <https://elearn.ntschoools.net/policies/5190>
- Speak up – For children and young people – <https://www.childsafety.gov.au/resources/speak-up-make-complaint/resources-for-children-and-young-people>
- Workplace requirements for incident reporting – <https://elearn.ntschoools.net/policies/4978>

Acronyms	Full form
CCTV	Closed-circuit television
Cth	Commonwealth
IT	Information Technology
NT	Northern Territory
NTG	Northern Territory Government
PSEMA	Public Sector Employment and Management Act
TRM	Territory Record Management system

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- Standards Australia Guidelines for complaint management in organisations AS 10002:2022.