BLUE GUM MONTESSORI SCHOOL
Grievance Resolution for Parents/Guardians

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Policy Description

Blue Gum Montessori School recognises and acknowledges the entitlement of parents/guardians to complain and aims to work with parents/guardians in the best interests of the children and staff in the school community.

Parents should feel valued and involved with the school and are encouraged to voice their concerns.

Problems are likely to arise if parents/guardians feel that the school is not open to their concerns. It is better to have a direct complaint to a member of staff than to have parents sharing their dissatisfaction with others.

The culture of Blue Gum Montessori School is open and complaints are received in a positive manner.

What constitutes a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem.

A complaint may be made if a parent/guardian thinks that the school has, for example:
- done something wrong;
- acted in a discriminatory manner
- failed to do something it should have done; or
- acted unfairly or impolitely.

A complaint may be made about the school as a whole, a particular aspect of the school, or about an individual member of staff or parent council.

Containment of grievances and work towards resolution

1. Process of dissemination of information on the process of Grievance Resolution.
   a. School Handbook – on enrolment, signed for by parents
   b. School Website
   c. Leaflet distributed in Term 2 of each year

2. An Open Organisation: Climate and Culture
Problems can arise if parents feel that the school is not open to their concerns. It is better to have a direct complaint to a member of staff than to have parents sharing their dissatisfaction with others. Parents like to feel valued and involved with the school and they should be encouraged to voice their concerns. Blue Gum Montessori School Parent Council and staff must ensure that there is evidence:

- that the school open, listening to parents and pupils?
- that parents are comfortable in contacting the Principal and the teachers?
- that staff are comfortable in dealing with complaints?

3. All complaints are handled seriously.

All queries and complaints must be considered serious and a response given within 24 hours of receipt of the complaint. In the response, a resolution may be offered immediately or a request for time made. In the request for time the member of staff must state when the next communication will take place by. Records must be kept of all complaints. The school will keep a file of complaints and other parental concerns because:

- it may become the cause of legal action in the future;
- patterns in the record may indicate a need for action;

4. Lines of Approach

Clarify you have all available information about the issue. Information can be obtained from:

- Class teachers
- Principal
- Community Life Coordinator
- Administration Officer
- Council member

For all educational issues:

Discussion should first take place with the class teacher.

If you are unsatisfied with the outcome then a letter outlining your concerns should be addressed to the Principal.

At the Principal’s discretion the matter may be taken to the Council for further consideration.

You will receive a letter from the Principal advising the outcome.

For issues regarding the behaviour of staff:

If possible discussion should first take place with the staff member concerned.

If you are unsatisfied with the outcome or are unable to discuss it with the class teacher, then a letter outlining your concerns should be addressed to the Principal.

You will receive a letter from the Principal advising the outcome.

If the concern is about the Principal:

Discussions must take place with the Principal.
If you are unsatisfied with the outcome or are unable to discuss it with the Principal, then a letter outlining your concerns should be addressed to the Council Chair.

You will receive a letter from the Council Chair advising the outcome.

**For general (non-educational) school matters:**

If a parent would like a matter to be brought up or discussed at a Council meeting, the first contact is a general member or Council Chair so the issue can be put on the Agenda. It is the general member’s responsibility to obtain information to be circulated to Council members prior to a meeting. This enables the Council members to be able to address the matter raised.

A parent has the option of attending the Council meeting, or being represented at that meeting by the general member. If the parent is attending, the parent will be invited to put forward their situation. When the parent leaves, a discussion will ensue and the parent will be advised by the Council Chair and/or general member of the outcome.

Some parents will wish to go straight to the Principal with their concerns, and this will be respected. However, it will be explained that the Principal might not be able to respond until he/she has consulted the staff that can help.

Serious complaints should be shared with the Council Chair by the Principal. There may be certain circumstances, such as complaints about the Principal, when the parents will need to write directly to the Council Chair.

Any written responses by members of staff must be discussed with the Principal before they are sent.

**4. Reducing Anxiety**

The school will reduce the anxiety of a complainant by taking the matter seriously and dispelling uncertainty about how the complaint will be handled. This will be achieved by:

- *Informing parents and staff about the complaints procedure*
- *Acknowledging complaints immediately (24 hours of receipt of complaint)* Staff should inform parents what is happening to their concern or complaint and, if a more detailed response is needed, by what date it will be received. The issue should be dealt with as quickly as possible.
- *Confirming the nature of the complaint and what is concerning the complainant.*
- *Assuring parents that their views matter.*

**5. Recording**

The school will keep an effective log of complaints and other parental concerns because:

- *it may become the cause of legal action in the future;*
- *patterns in the record may indicate a need for action;*
- *the Principal should be able to check the log and report on it regularly to the Parent Council.*

The log should contain the following information:
• date when the issue was raised;
• name of parent;
• name of pupil;
• brief statement of issue;
• location of detailed file;
• member of staff handling the issue; and
• brief statement of outcome.

Confidential files on all complaints will be maintained and kept together, cross-referenced with other files as necessary. The files will contain simple but clear notes of all conversations with parents about any source of dissatisfaction. This applies to friendly chats and to telephone conversations, as misunderstandings easily arise. There should be a clear statement of what is concerning the complainants. The notes can be agreed with parents.

Records concerning students need to be kept for 7 years after the student reaches 18 years of age.

The Log is kept in the Principal's Office.

7. Confidentiality

Confidentiality is an important issue for pupils, parents and staff. It is essential that any complaint is treated in a confidential manner and with respect.

Parents often seek an assurance of confidentiality before expressing their concerns. If, for example, they wish to discuss a particular member of staff, they may fear that their child will suffer in some way because they have complained.

It is the school's policy that complaints made by parents should not rebound adversely on their children and similarly that complaints raised by pupils should not rebound on them or on other pupils.

The question of confidentiality should be discussed sensitively and on an individual basis with the parents and the school’s policy should be carefully explained.

Members of staff will be informed about complaints that might be damaging to their reputation. Training and support will be provided to help staff to deal not only with complaints that are made to them, but also to complaints that are made about them. This may involve a colleague who is not involved in the complaint.

If there is a situation involving the Police, the Principal, or next most senior staff member if the Principal is unavailable, must take responsibility for action in the school and the Council Chair should be informed as soon as possible.

8. Anonymous Complaints

Anonymous complaints may be where there is no name or address supplied, or where the complainants say that they do not wish to be identified.

Parents and pupils should be encouraged to give their names and should be given reassurance on the issue of confidentiality. If they persist in wishing to remain anonymous, it is at the Principal's discretion as to what action, if any, should be taken, depending on the nature of the complaint.

Anonymous complaints should be recorded in the log.
9. Resolution

Satisfaction for a complainant may come from any of the following:

- knowing that changes have been made, and that matters will be different in future
- knowing that the school is now alert to a possible problem
- feeling that their concern has been considered seriously
- an outcome which may be different from the one they sought, but which they perceive to be well-considered
- a considered letter
- an apology.

If time has been needed to consider matters, parents should receive a report letter. This should assure the complainant that the issue has been understood and the matter is being dealt with.

The school is not obliged to keep complainants informed as to what action has been taken. This is especially important when the matter involves a staff member. The complainant maybe assured that action has been taken. This will help prevent misinformation being circulated in the school community.

10. Intractable Complaints

If a complaint becomes intractable, due to its nature or to the way in which it was handled, or possibly because the parent perceives the school to have ‘closed ranks’ against him or her the complaint will be taken to the Council Chair, the Conciliation Committee or an arbiter.

- Referral to the Chairman of the School Council

In some cases the procedure will be that the Principal refers the matter to the Council Chair and informs the parents that this stage has been reached. However, a situation may arise where the complainant is unhappy with the Principal’s response. In this case the parent should write directly to the Chair.

The Council Chair will discuss the matter fully with the Principal and be provided with relevant documentation. If a briefing is required from a member of staff, this will occur in the presence of the Principal.

The Council Chair will respond to the parents, notifying them that he/she is reviewing the matter, asking them if they wish to add anything further and providing a date by which they may expect a response.

The Council Chair’s response should be clear and detailed, and should offer a meeting if the parents remain troubled.

11. Meeting with the Council Chair

If a meeting is requested, the Council Chair will offer to meet the parents at a time convenient to them. Those involved are:

- The Council Chair
- the Principal and, at the most, one other member of staff
- the parents
Parents should be permitted to bring with them a supportive friend who is not involved with the complaint. Legal representation would be discouraged at this stage.

The Council Chair, after questioning and listening to the parents and the Principal, may be able to find a solution. If this is not possible, and the parents wish to take the matter further, the Council Chair could consider the Conciliation Committee or seeking the advice of an independent arbitrator.

12. **Referral to a Conciliation Committee**

The Council convenes a Conciliation Committee composed of:

- *The Convenor is a Council member, other than the Chair.*
- *There are up to four other members, of whom at least two are Council Members.*
- *Three members, including the Convenor, constitute a quorum for an individual case.*
- *Members are committed to keeping the proceedings of the Committee confidential and to operating in a fair and objective manner – their aim is to conciliate.*
- *In accepting appointment, members accept that they may never be called upon to meet.*

The Council Chairman, in consultation with the Principal, decides when to refer a complaint to the Conciliation Committee, and invites the Convenor to call a meeting.

The Chairman has no further involvement until the Convenor reports back at the end of the Committee’s deliberations.

13. **Meeting with the Conciliation Committee**

Those involved in the meeting are:

- *the Committee members, including the Convenor*
- *the Principal, and possibly a key member of staff*
- *the parents, who are invited to bring a supportive friend, as for the meeting with the Council Chair.*

14. **Meeting Procedure**

Sufficient time should be committed to the meeting.

The parents and the Principal should be asked in advance whether there are any papers they would like to have considered at the meeting, bearing in mind the need for all to keep the proceedings confidential. The papers are copied and distributed before the meeting.

The Convenor emphasises that he or she is concerned to reach a positive conclusion and invites first the parents, then the Principal to speak. After this, the Convenor encourages questions and general discussion.

The Convenor may find it helpful at some point to invite the Principal, the parents and their friend to withdraw from the discussion for a time, leaving the Committee alone.

If more time is required, it may be necessary to convene a second meeting. If so, Committee members must commit themselves to attend, as continuity is essential.
If a positive solution is reached, the Convenor should summarise the outcome and confirm the nature of the agreement before the meeting disperses. The agreement should be recorded, copied and circulated as soon as possible.

At the end of the Committee’s deliberations, the Convenor makes a full report to the Chair of the Parent Council and informs the parents that this is being done. The Chair would expect to endorse the Committee’s decision.

14. Referral to an Arbiter

As a final step in the disputes and complaints procedure, if appropriate, schools could use an independent arbiter to resolve an issue. The arbiter would have to be:
- Agreed by both parties
- Remunerated by both parties (if appropriate)
- Assured both parties will accept the arbiter’s decision.

15. Further Action

At all stages of a complaints resolution procedure the complainant should be reminded that they can seek legal advice if they wish, especially at the point where the school has done all it can to reach a resolution.

Outcomes

The school’s complaints procedure is designed to resolve problems and can provide the school with helpful information.

Complaints will be treated as constructive suggestions and used to improve standards, which may prevent cause for further complaint.
Nature of the concern?
If you are unsure of which path to take, consult Class liaison, Enrolment Officer, Teacher or a Council Member.

Matters regarding:
- your child
- educational issues
- staff members
- other children

Class Teacher

Principal

Matters regarding:
- Governance
- non educational
- Polices and Procedures
- other families

Members Of Council

Chair of Council

If no resolution

Conciliation Committee

If no resolution

Arbiter