The NSW Office of the Director of Equal Opportunity in Public Employment Policy and Guidelines’ Dealing with Employee Work-related Concerns and Grievances states that the NSW Government requires public agencies to achieve and maintain workplaces that foster productive and harmonious working environments and where work related concerns or grievances are managed promptly, impartially and justly.

The National Code of Good Practice for Responding to Complaints about Vocational and Education Training Quality – Australian Department of Education, Science and Training details the rights of education and training clients to the principles of fairness, accessibility, transparency, responsiveness, accountability and constructiveness.

All minor complaint and disputes should be resolved promptly and without using formal procedures. Whenever possible, informal resolution should be attempted first in all matters assessed as less serious.

The sections of the DEC Complaints Handling Procedures which detail the formal procedures should be used in those situations where it is not appropriate or not possible to resolve a matter informally.

Schools – a guide for parents and carers

It is best to discuss your concerns with your child’s teacher first. Make an appropriate time to meet with them or phone the school and ask for an appointment with the teacher.

If you are not happy with the result, or if you do not feel it is appropriate to talk to them, phone and make an appointment to discuss your concerns with the principal.

You may bring a friend or relative to be your support. If you need an interpreter, we can arrange that - just ask beforehand.

If your complaint is about the principal you will need to contact the school education director in your area. Ask the school office staff at your school for their name and number.

If your complaint cannot be resolved in an informal way, we may ask you to put it in writing. It is important that you include specific details of the situation and tell us what you would like to happen as a result of your complaint. We can help you to put your complaint in writing, if you require it.

Alternatively a complaint form may also be used. Complete the form and send it to the principal, or the school education director in your area.

Can I get help to make a complaint?

The person receiving or managing the complaint should provide you with any help you need to make your complaint. Please ask for it, if it is not offered initially.

In schools, it is the responsibility of the principal to assist school community members with special needs to make complaints about school or schooling. This may involve consultation with regional office personnel.
How will my complaint be handled?

The person who receives your complaint must consider the nature and seriousness of the issues you raise.

The person managing the complaint should always try to resolve those complaints assessed as ‘less serious’ by informal means first.

Sometimes complaints termed ‘special cases’ will be referred to certain parts of the department or to outside agencies. If this is the case, you will be advised where the matter was referred and the name and contact number of the person managing it.

If your complaint is considered to be serious or not appropriate to be managed informally, there are three types of formal procedures used, depending on the nature of the complaint – remedy and systems improvement, negotiation, and investigation.

What about confidentiality?

All parties to a complaint are expected to treat the matter confidentially.

This requires everyone, including the complainant, to ensure that information is restricted to those who genuinely need to know. Furthermore, those people should only be told as much as they need to know and no more. For example, some people may need to know of the issue so that they can provide advice, but not of the identities of the persons involved.

What if I need support during the process?

We understand that people may be affected by a complaint and the process related to it.

If you need support, you could approach the person dealing with the matter for a recommendation as to who might be available to support you.

What if I am not satisfied with the outcome?

It is possible that, at the end of the process, you will not receive the outcome that you wanted. If you feel that you have not been treated fairly or that the result is unreasonable, you can request that the matter be reviewed either internally or externally.

External bodies that may be able to assist include:

- NSW Ombudsman
- Anti-Discrimination Board of NSW (ADB)
- Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC)