

Complaints and Disputes Policy



RATIONALE

This policy provides guidelines for complaints and disputes within The King's College. It seeks to acknowledge and perpetuate the original vision of those who founded the College as a Christian educational community with a Spirit filled emphasis. It further seeks to facilitate learning excellence founded on biblically-based beliefs, values and lifestyle – able to support the learning needs of students and resolve any complaints and disputes that may arise. The intention and purpose of the policy is to 'cover the field' with respect to matters of complaints and disputes. However, the Principal has discretion over any matter not specifically addressed by the policy and in circumstances where the arbitrary application of the policy does not achieve the overarching purpose of the schools vision, mission and objectives.

GENERAL PRICIPLES AND PURPOSE

The King's College considers its parents as partners in the education of their children, acknowledging that God considers parents to be the primary caregivers and educators of their children. The college recognises that despite being a partnership, grievances may arise, and it follows the biblical pattern for resolving the issues with the aim of bringing about a resolution without damaging relationships.

The college welcomes and considers suggestions and comments from parents, and takes all raised complaints and concerns seriously.

A complaint will be received as a genuine dissatisfaction that needs a considered response.

A complaint may be made if a parent thinks that the college has:

- Done something wrong
- Failed to do something it should have done; or
- Acted unfairly, unjustly or improperly

As such, a complaint may be made about the college as a whole, about a specific department in the college, or about an individual staff member. It is the college policy that complaints made by parents will be treated with respect and confidentiality.

PROCEDURES FOR DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS & DISPUTES

PARENTAL COMPLAINTS & DISPUTES

Matthew 18:15 "If your brother wrongs you, go and show him his fault, between you and him privately. If he listens to you, you have won back your brother.

But if he does not listen, take along with you one or two others, so that every word may be confirmed and upheld by the testimony of two or three witnesses."

1. The parent goes to the staff member with whom they have a dispute and attempts to resolve the matter.
Parents are asked to make appointments through the student diary or the registrar. Please indicate the matter to be discussed to enable the staff member to prepare for the meeting. Staff are open and happy to discuss all issues, with the intention of solving them with a minimum of fuss.
2. If there is no resolution with the staff member, parents are encouraged to involve a third party. In the school context this would mean the staff coordinator.
For student issues, the third party would be the form teacher.
3. If the matter is still not resolved, parents are encouraged to bring the issue to the principal's attention.
4. Should the matter continue to be unresolved, the parent can ask to meet with the Chairman of the College Board and the Principal.
5. As a last avenue of reconciliation, the parent may request to be heard by a college Conciliation Committee. The committee will consist of a convenor who is not the Chairman of the Board, a Pastor from Freeway church, two Board Members who have not been involved in the case, and a Principal from another Christian school.

SERIOUS EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Where there has been serious incompetence or sexual misconduct, the matter should be referred immediately to the Principal.

In the event that such an issue involves the Principal the matter should be referred to the College Board.

Only matters of such seriousness are to be referred to the Principal, and other matters should not circumvent the College's Grievance Procedure. In the event of such a breach, the individuals concerned will be referred back to the level where they departed from the procedure.

In the event that a college staff member seeks to break with procedure, disciplinary action may be taken.

STAFF COMPLAINTS & DISPUTES concerning Parents

Once again the biblical pattern for dealing with disputes applies for staff dealing with parents.

1. Firstly the staff member attempts to resolve the issue with the parent. The staff member needs to make the effort to discuss their concerns even if a previous meeting has been held.
2. If no resolution has been achieved, the staff member should refer the matter to the Staff Coordinator who will make contact as in stage 1.
3. If still no satisfactory resolution has been achieved by the Staff Coordinator, the parent will be referred to the Principal, who will be the final arbitrator to the matter. If no resolution is possible the enrolment of the family in the College may need to be reviewed.

Where a resolution has been achieved in stage 2 or 3, the aggrieved staff member will be informed and both parties will meet with the third party in attendance.

STAFF COMPLAINTS & DISPUTES

For disputes and grievances arising between members of the College Staff, whether teaching, administrative or ancillary, the biblical pattern is still applied.

1. The staff member seeks to resolve the matter with the person concerned. To respect each other's time, an appointment should be made to do this, with an indication of the reason for the meeting.
2. If the matter is not resolved, a third party should be involved, namely the Staff Coordinator for teaching staff, or the Bursar or Principal for Administrative Staff.
3. The College Principal is responsible for ALL staff management decisions and is the last level of appeal for internal staffing issues. Should the staff member wish to take the matter further, the issue will be a matter of dispute with the Principal and should be followed as such:
 - Disputes involving the Principal should be referred firstly to the Principal
 - If the staff member is not happy with the results of the discussion, they may request a meeting with the Principal and the Chairman of the Board. No other members of the Board are to be involved at this level.
 - If the staff member is still not satisfied with the results, they may request the matter be brought before the college Conciliation Committee. At this level, the request must be made in writing, giving full details of the issues and the action that has been made to date.
 - If the matter is still not resolved after having been addressed by the Conciliation Committee, the staff member must understand that the Board is the final level of appeal for issues relating to the College Principal. If the matter is taken to the Board, it will also be referred to the Freeway Church Eldership as well.
4. If the matter the staff member is seeking to have resolved relates to salary, conditions or an industrial matter and it remains unresolved at this level, the staff member and/or the Principal may refer the matter to the Independent Schools Salaried Officers' Association and the Industrial Officer of the Association of Independent Schools of WA.
5. If the matter is not resolved at this level, it may be referred to the Australian Industrial Relations Commission.

STUDENT COMPLAINTS & DISPUTES

1. Firstly the student is to go to the person concerned and attempt to resolve the matter. Staff, particularly the chaplain, may need to offer guidance for reconciliation.
2. If not able to do point 1, the student may raise concerns with a staff member with whom they feel comfortable, e.g. form teacher, chaplain, or principal. Staff need to diarise these issues and the resolution.
3. In complex situations that are resolved, the staff member should discuss the outcome and share the written record to ensure student understanding. Complex issues could include personality clashes and student feeling picked on or bullied.

Mandatory Reporting is compulsory so any disclosures of sexual abuse must be reported to the Principal who will communicate with the Department of Child Protection.

All staff have undergone Mandatory Reporting training and should refer to their given information regarding reporting.

GUIDELINES FOR DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS & DISPUTES

All complaints need to be handled seriously. Parents are the college's clientele and need to be heard with respect and sincerity. Any problem that remains unresolved may become a festering dispute or a confrontation. Procedures must therefore be followed for appropriate action when a matter remains unresolved or cannot be resolved quickly. Complaints against members of staff need particularly sensitive handling.

LINES OF APPROACH

All staff members are encouraged to deal with parental concerns that lie within their area of responsibility.

If approached about a matter that lies outside your area of responsibility, staff should refer it to the appropriate person and inform the parents.

Matters incapable of resolution at a particular level should be referred to the appropriate Staff Coordinator, with parents kept informed of the action being taken.

Senior staff will recognise when issues need to go straight to the Principal, with whom the responsibility for most complaints lie.

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

Serious complaints will be shared with the Chairman of the Board by the Principal. There may be certain circumstances, such as complaints about the Principal, when parents will need to write direct to the Chairman.

Written responses should always be discussed with the Principal, who would sign the response.

REDUCING ANXIETY

Because the person who complains may feel vulnerable, the College can reduce anxiety by taking the matter seriously and dispelling uncertainty about how the complaint will be handled.

- Information about the complaints procedure should be clear.
- Complaints should be acknowledged immediately or within 5 working days.
- Parents should be informed of what is happening regarding their complaint.
- If a more detailed response is required, give the expected response time, which should be prompt.

- Staff should be clear about the nature of the complaint, and may need to request more detail, or have it put in writing.
- It may be appropriate to discuss possible outcomes.

RECORDING

The college will maintain a log of complaints and other parental concerns on the administration software program SchoolPro.

- It may become the cause of legal action in the future.
- Patterns may become evident and indicate a need for action.

The documentation should generally contain the following information:

- Date of when the issue was raised.
- Name of parent
- Name of pupil
- Brief statement of issue
- Brief statement of outcome

Confidential files should be maintained on SchoolPro, as well as in student files. Clear notes of all conversations with parents about any source of dissatisfaction should be made by staff and filed in student files. This applies to friendly chats and to telephone conversations, as misunderstandings easily arise.

CONFIDENTIALTY

It is really important to maintain confidentiality for the students, parents and the staff. If a parent does not want to raise an issue with the teacher because of sensitivity, it is essential that the complaint be treated confidentially and with respect. The parents may seek assurance of confidentiality before the discussion.

All staff must be clear that it is The King's College policy that complaints made by parents should not rebound adversely on their children, and similarly, 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 college's policy should be carefully explained.

It may be possible to deal with a problem without naming individuals, but often the source of the complaint is still evident. In some instances, it may be impractical to investigate without identifying the member of staff or the child. It may be in the interest of the child to do so.

Staff members are rightly concerned that they should know about complaints that might be damaging to their reputation. Such complaints will be known only to themselves and to those who have been consulted.

If there is a situation involving the Police, the Principal (or next most senior person), must take responsibility for action in the college and the Governing Body Chairperson should be informed as soon as possible.

ANONYMOUS COMPLAINTS

Anonymous complaints may be where there is no indication of either name or address, or where the complainants say that they do not wish to be identified. They may come from members of the public, from parents or from students.

Complaints from members of the public about the behaviour of a group of students could be dealt with on a general basis, with reminders to all students about the college's Code of Behaviour.

Parents and students should be encouraged to give their names and should be given reassurance of confidentiality. If they persist in remaining anonymous, it is at the Principal's discretion what action, if any, should be taken.

Anonymous complaints should be recorded on SchoolPro.

RESOLUTION

Sometimes the acknowledgement itself of an issue by the college brings relief to parents.

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

- Knowing changes have been made, and that matters will be different in the future.
- Knowing that the college is now alert to a possible problem.
- Feeling that their concern has been considered seriously.
- Although the outcome is different to expectations, it is perceived to be well considered.
- A letter covering the above points.
- An apology.

INTRACTABLE COMPLAINTS

There may be a small minority of persistent or aggressive complainants who will never be satisfied, whatever the college does. The college may even discover on investigation that the complaint was without foundation or motivated by malice. Nevertheless it is wise to treat all complaints seriously and to follow the procedures.

Most complaints can be resolved if approached positively. If a complaint cannot be resolved, it may be due to its nature or in the way in which it was handled, or possibly because the parent perceives the college to have 'closed ranks' against him or her.

The stages of action may include:

- **Referral to the Chairman of the College Board**

In most cases the Principal will refer the matter to the Chairman of the College Board. In some cases the parent may feel the complaint has been mishandled by the Principal and may write directly to the chairman.

The Chairman should discuss the matter with the Principal, be provided with relevant documentation, and if relevant, talk to staff in the presence of the Principal.

The Chairman should respond to parents, notify them that he/she is reviewing the matter, and provide a date by which the parent should receive a response.

The Chairman may be able to offer a new approach to the matter which satisfies the parent. The response should be clear and detailed, and should offer a meeting if the parent remains troubled.

- **Meeting with the Chairman of the College Board**

If a meeting is requested, the Chairman offers to meet the parents at a time convenient to them. Those involved are:

1. The Chairman of the Board
2. The Principal and, at the most, one other member of staff
3. The parents

Parents should be permitted to bring with them a supportive friend who is not involved with the complaint.

The Chairman, after questioning and listening to the parents and the Principal, may be able to find a solution. If this is not possible, and the parent wishes to take the matter further, the Chairman could consider seeking the advice of an independent arbitrator.

- **Referral to a Conciliation Committee**

The college will establish a Conciliation Committee and the following sections propose a model for such a committee and a set of protocols for its operation.

1. The Convener is a Board Member, other than the Chairman
2. There are up to four other members, of whom at least two are Board Members, one is a Pastor from Freeway Church and one is a Principal of another Christian School.
3. Three members, including the Convener, constitute a quorum for an individual case.
4. 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.
5. In accepting an appointment, members understand that they may never be called upon to meet.

The Chairman of the College Board, in consultation with the Principal, decides when to refer a complaint to the Conciliation Committee, and invites the Convener to call a meeting.

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

- **Meeting with the Conciliation Committee**

Those involved in the meeting are:

1. Up to five Committee members, including the Convener.
2. The Principal, and possibly a key member of staff.
3. The parents, who are invited to bring a supportive friend, as for the meeting with the Chairman of the College Board.

A sufficient amount of time is committed to the meeting, in case it is needed.

The parents and the Principal are asked in advance whether there are 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 Convener emphasizes that he or she is concerned to reach a positive conclusion and invites first the parents, and then the Principal to speak. After this, the Convener will encourage questions and general discussion.

The Convener 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 Convener 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 Convener makes a full report to the Chairman of the College Board and informs the parents that this is being done. The Chairman would expect to endorse the Committee's decision.

TRAINING

Given the diverse nature of complaints, the College, through training, will help staff, (including support staff), know how to carry out their responsibilities. Training will cover:

1. The complaints procedure
2. Communication skills, such as listening, questioning and calming.
3. Handling complaints, negotiation and mediation skills.
4. Skills in observing, recording and reporting.
5. The benefits of handling complaints well and the consequences of handling them badly.

All staff are now required to participate in training for Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse.

APPLICABLE LAW

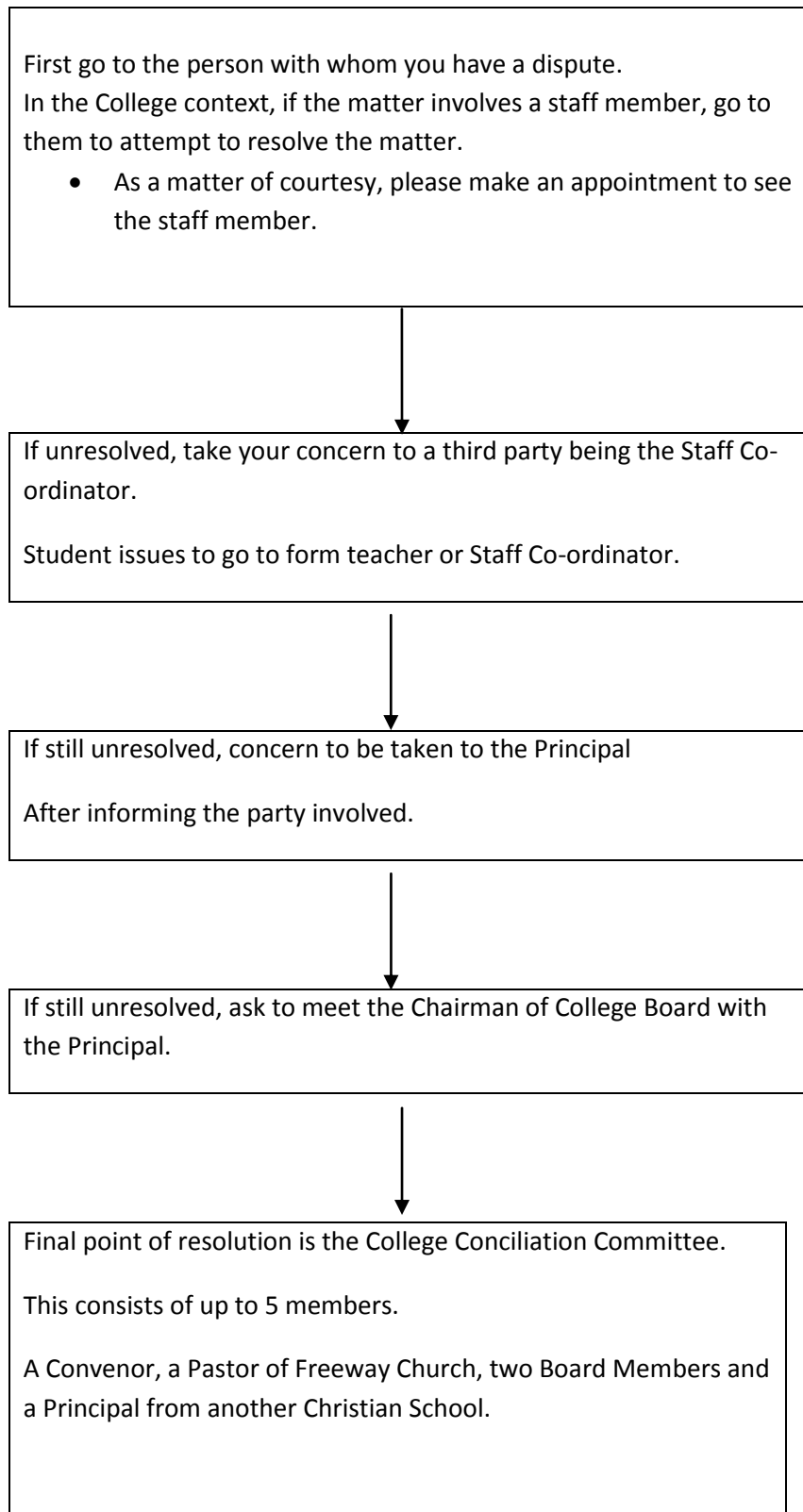
The King's College acknowledges its obligations to comply with all relevant and applicable statutes and laws of the State of Western Australia and the Commonwealth in the implementation of its Complaints & Disputes Policy.

RELEVANT POLICIES

- Duty of Care Policy
- Child Protection Policy
- Safe Schools/Anti-Bullying Management Policy and Procedure
- Standard of Personal Conduct Policy

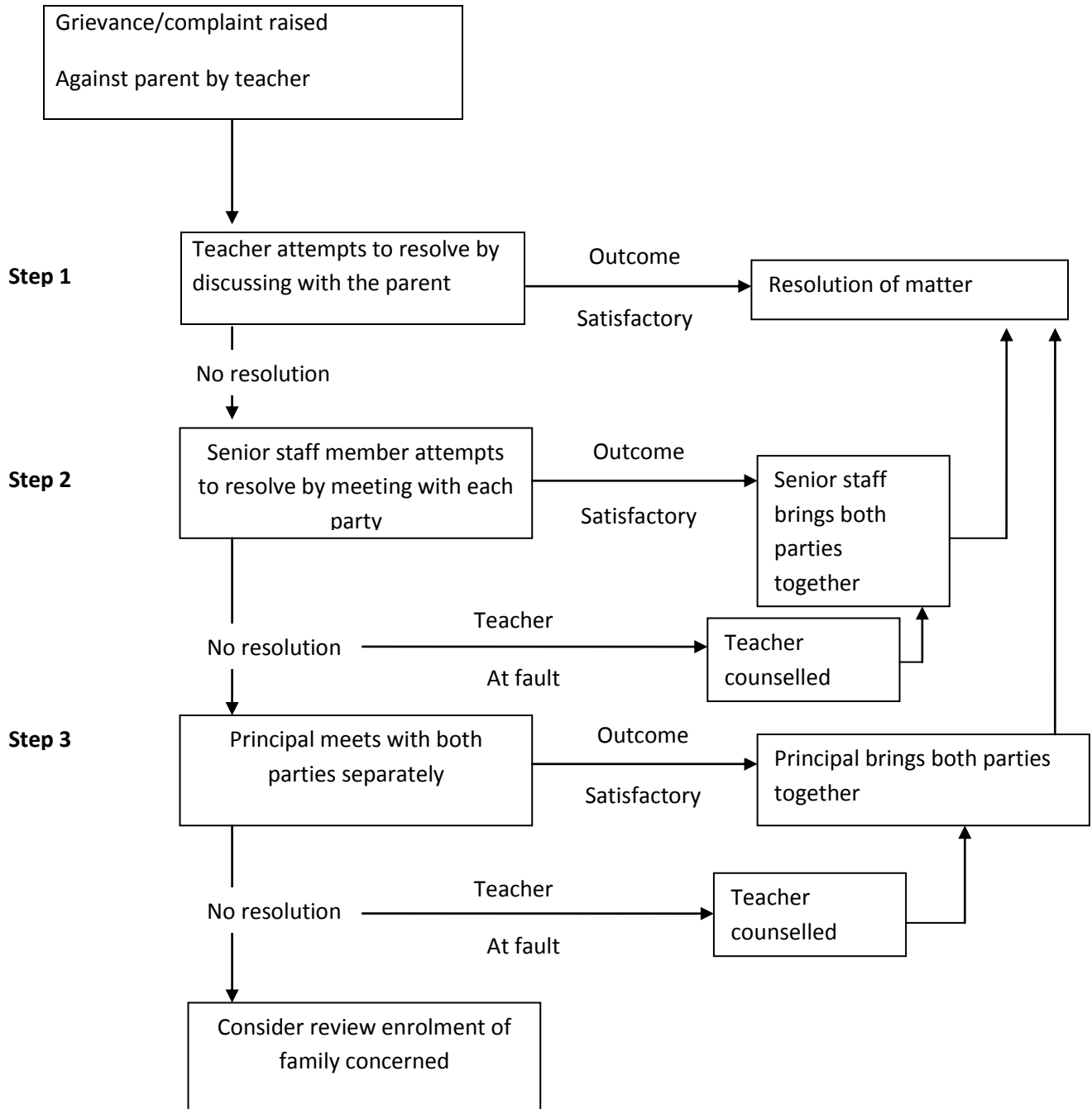
ANNEXUES

- Parental Complaints and Disputes Procedure
- Staff Complaints and Disputes Concerning Parent Procedure
- Staff Complaints and Disputes Procedure
- Student Complaints and Disputes Procedure

APPENDIX 1**PARENTAL COMPLAINTS AND DISPUTES PROCEDURE**

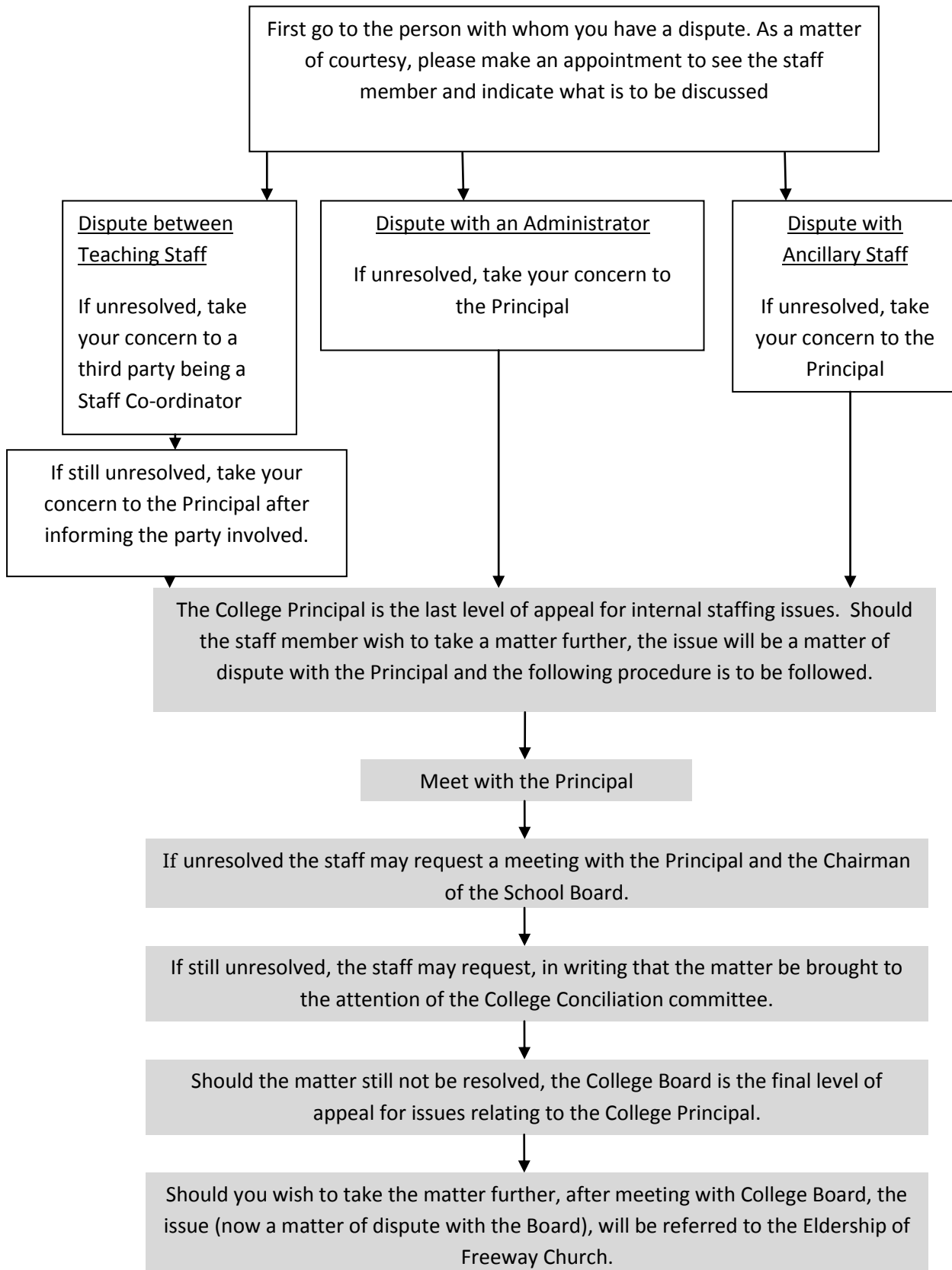
APPENDIX 2

STAFF COMPLAINTS AND DISPUTES CONCERNING PARENT PROCEDURE



APPENDIX 3

STAFF COMPLAINTS AND DISPUTES PROCEDURE



APPENDIX 4**STUDENT COMPLAINTS AND DISPUTES PROCEDURE**