



ST. MARY'S GRIEVANCE & COMPLAINTS POLICY & PROCEDURE

Introduction

Catholic schools strive to be communities of faith, hope and love where communication takes place in an environment of transparency, respect, compassion, fairness, inclusion and a Christian concern for all. Within the reality of the schooling experience, it is recognised that from time to time misunderstandings and issues will arise and that these need to be resolved satisfactorily in partnership with members of the school community. These situations can be opportunities to model the love of Christ and our response should be founded on a belief in the dignity of each person on respect, compassion, integrity and truth.

A grievance or complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived issue at a school where a response or resolution is expected. The complaint may be about an individual staff member, a learner or a policy or procedure.

This policy does not cover complaints that are :

- of a child protection nature. These must be addressed in accordance with child protection laws and reporting obligations (see PROTECT) : Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools);
- from staff about aspects of their work or employment condition. It is appropriate that schools handle these matters in accordance with relevant internal policies and processes regarding these matters and consider as appropriate the Victorian Catholic Education Multi Enterprise Agreement 2018 (VCEMEA);
- reportable allegations. These must be addressed in accordance with the reportable conduct scheme (see Reportable Conduct Scheme: Commission for Children and Young People).

Behavioural Expectations :

At St. Mary's Primary School, it is expected that all communication will be conducted in a manner whereby :

1. Everyone is treated with respect.
2. All parties are open to listening to the concerns raised.
3. All members of the school community can expect that their concerns will be taken seriously.
4. All parties conduct themselves in a respectful and courteous manner.
5. Complaints will be addressed professionally, competently and in a timely manner and will be bound by the principles of procedural fairness and confidentiality. Acceptable modes of communication :

- Verbal : Phone or face to face meeting;
- Written: Letter, Email (teacher email or principal email) or digital school complaint form

<https://goo.gl/forms/BadjgKvXgBCYA8Jx2>

Please note that anonymous communication will not be addressed.

TABLE OF GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES

The school strongly encourages all grievances to be addressed initially in an informal manner (as outlined below) so that complaints / concerns are resolved closest to the source of the issue.

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE - GENERAL INFORMATION

LEARNERS with a grievance should :	STAFF with a grievance should :
1. Communicate with the person causing the concern : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate respectfully • Tell them why they are upsetting you and ask them to stop 	1. Communicate with the person causing the concern : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss the concern directly with the person involved, stating the problem clearly and objectively; • Seek to resolve it in a way that respects the needs of those involved; • Please allow a reasonable time frame for the person to address the issue (e.g. 2 business days). <p>* NB: If the grievance is with another staff member and is of a "reportable conduct" nature, please refer to the reportable conduct procedures.</p>
2. Communicate with staff and the learners parents if the problem persists : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff members will address the issue in a timely manner. Please allow at least 2 business days. 	2. If grievance is not resolved : Speak to Principal or Deputy Principal or the nominated staff union rep. Support from these people entails : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speaking to the person involved on your behalf • Monitoring the situation • Investigating your concern • Acting as mediator <p>Documents grievance the following complaints register : https://goo.gl/SNSMWk</p>
3. Make an appointment : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents arrange a time for parents and/or learner to meet with the teacher • Issue documented by teacher 	3. If grievance is not resolved within a reasonable time frame (e.g. 5 business days) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Principal may arrange a time to consult with/ request assistance from the Parish Priest.
4. Make an appointment with the Principal or Deputy Principal : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issue documented 	4. If grievance is still not resolved within a reasonable time frame : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Principal may then seek assistance from the Regional Consultant from the CEO Sandhurst

COMPLAINTS RELATED TO THE SCHOOL/PARENTS OR LEARNERS

Please note that complaints / concerns made on weekends, public holidays or school term holidays will be resolved during normal school hours

Anonymous complaints will not be addressed

PARENTS/CAREGIVERS WITH A GRIEVANCE SHOULD :		
For issues with other parents :	For issues with other learners :	For issues with the school :
<p>1. Maintain appropriate communication & behaviour. Keep calm and use appropriate language.</p>	<p>1. Maintain appropriate communication & behaviour Keep calm and use appropriate language.</p>	<p>1. Maintain appropriate communication & behaviour Keep calm and use appropriate language.</p>
<p>2. Determine if it is a school issue If there is an issue between parents that does not concern a child from the school or is not school related, then parents must deal with it in a calm and rational manner, not involving staff.</p>	<p>2. Make an appointment :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If a parent has an issue with a learner in the school, they must take it to their classroom teacher. Parents must not approach other people's children. 	<p>2. Make an appointment to see the Principal or Deputy Principal. Allow a reasonable time frame (at least 2 business days) for the issue to be addressed.</p>
<p>3. Make an appointment : If a parent has an issue with another parent concerning a child or school related problem, they must take it to the Principal or Deputy Principal.</p>	<p>3. Allow a reasonable time frame (2 business days) for the issue to be addressed by the classroom teacher and 5 business days for it to be resolved. The classroom teacher may seek assistance from the Principal or Leadership team.</p>	<p>3. The Parish Priest or School Advisory Board (SAB) may be consulted if no resolution with the Principal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grievances can be expressed in writing to the Parish Priest or Chair of the School Board to be tabled for the following meeting. The Parish Priest/School Board will respond in writing

4. Allow a reasonable time frame for the issue to be addressed.	4. If still no resolution : Parents should contact the Principal (via face to face, phone, email or digital complaints form https://goo.gl/SNSMWk who will arrange a meeting between the necessary parties and pursue an appropriate course of action.	4. If no resolution, the parent may wish to contact the CEO Sandhurst.
5. The Parish Priest may be consulted.	5. The Principal may wish to involve the Parish Priest or Regional Consultant of the CEO Sandhurst.	
	6. At no time should any parent approach another parent or child with a grievance. All grievances should be directed to the teacher and or the Principal/ Leadership team.	

COMPLAINTS TO AND FROM COMMUNITY MEMBERS

For issues related to neighbours/members of the surrounding community:	For issues from members of the community regarding the school	School grievances with external community members
PARENTS/CAREGIVERS with a grievance should :	MEMBERS OF THE EXTERNAL COMMUNITY with a grievance should :	THE SCHOOL should :
1. Communicate grievance to the school via the front office or through staff.	1. Maintain appropriate communication & behaviour. Keep calm and use appropriate language.	1. Principal to contact Person of concern to discuss issue.
2. Communicate grievance to the Principal: Principal may choose to call or arrange an appointment to discuss the issue further.	2. Communicate grievance to the school via the front office, in writing or through staff. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anonymous communication will not be addressed 	2. Principal to consult Parish Priest
3. The Parish Priest may be consulted at the Principal's discretion.	3. Make an appointment with the Principal.	3. Principal to consult CEO Sandhurst.

4. CEO Sandhurst may be consulted at the Principal's discretion.	4. The Principal may wish to involved the Parish Priest or Regional Consultant of the CEO Sandhurst.	
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Options for resolving a complaint or grievance

There are both formal and informal options for the resolution of a grievance or complaint. Use of informal options (such as those indicated above) is recommended in the first instance as it may prevent the escalation of a minor dispute to a more serious complaint.

Informal options

The following informal options could be considered :

Self-resolution - The parties themselves may resolve concerns in open discussion with the provision of relevant information or the clarification of issues. This option involves reflection and conversations respectful of each person's needs in the school.

Supported self-resolution - The parties may be assisted to resolve possible misunderstanding , miscommunication or lack of clarity about the issue in question by a support person such as a colleague, supervisor, principal, leader or counsellor providing professional advice or support.

Facilitated mediation - The parties may be assisted by a facilitator who is trained in mediation to identify issues, explore options and consider alternatives to find a resolution. The facilitator may be an external mediator, a senior colleague, a principal, a school teacher or a counsellor.

Formal options

In circumstances where no mutually acceptable resolution to the matter is reached through informal resolution, or in cases where the matter is considered to be serious, formal procedures can include :

Intervention - The principal may meet with the party or parties separately or jointly. If this does not resolve the issue, then the principal makes a decision and notifies the parties of that decision.

Investigation - A complaint about a person concerning an alleged serious breach of legislation, school policy or procedure (e.g. student bullying, student drug and alcohol issues) may require an investigation.

Note: This process is not applicable in a complaint of a child protection nature, which must be addressed in accordance with child protection laws and reporting obligations. (See PROTECT: Identifying and Reporting to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools.)

For a staff member, an investigation may be appropriate in those matters involving allegations of potential misconduct or misbehaviour which may result in disciplinary action. An investigation into these types of allegations must be conducted in accordance with Clause 13 of the Victorian Catholic Education Multi Enterprise Agreement 2018. (VCEMEA)

The nature and scope of an investigation will depend on the circumstances of each matter and any relevant issues which need to be taken into account, such as whether the school had followed the relevant policies and procedures.

Responding to Grievances

Please allow a minimum of 2 business days for issues to be addressed. In some cases longer time will be necessary to investigate the situation if it is more complex or involving multiple people. Not every issue requires a formal written acknowledgment. Complaints of a less serious nature (which is most complaints) can be acknowledged verbally and resolves without the need for a formal investigation or a written response.

Procedural Fairness

The school will :

- respect the right of all parties to be heard and treated fairly
- respond to complaints promptly and thoroughly
- make sure all parties understand the complaints policy and the process
- if the complaint is about a person, give that person the opportunity to respond to any allegations
- conduct investigations impartially, substantiate the facts of the matter and maintain appropriate records
- appropriately communicate the reason for any decision and any action it intends to take
- meet privacy and other legal obligations
- record complaints on a secure database with relevant levels of authorised access.

Confidentiality

The school will maintain confidentiality and anonymity as far as is reasonable. This means that the school will evaluate the use of information in order to refer the complaint, manage the complaint, provide support through the process or review and/or decide on actions and outcomes as appropriate.

The school will treat your complaint with respect and sensitivity. However, it may not be possible that all communications with us, or any documents you may supply to us, will necessarily be kept confidential. Although we endeavour to deal with complaints with appropriate discretion, we reserve our right to disclose details of the matter to other persons who, in our opinion, need to know them in order to facilitate the resolution of the complaint.

Anonymous Complaints

Anonymous complaints will be retained by the school but will not be addressed. Anonymous complaints of a child protection nature will be addressed in accordance with child protection laws and reporting obligations (i.e. as per PROTECT: Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools).

If complainant's behaviour is unreasonable or escalates :

- The safety and wellbeing of staff and students will be ensured
- Face to face/phone interaction: The complainant will be asked to be civil and warned that any further repetition of unwarranted behaviour will lead to the termination of the conversation
- Termination of conversation/interview if behaviour continues
- Consultation of principal/delegated staff member or CEO Sandhurst personnel for next steps as required
- Email/written communication: response to email informing the complainant that their tone or content is inappropriate
- Termination of email correspondence
- Consultation of principal/delegated staff member or CEO Sandhurst personnel for next steps as required
- Meeting with complainant organised

Possible resolutions

Resolution for a complainant may include:

- feeling that their concern has been considered seriously
- knowing that the school is now alerted to a possible problem
- achieving an outcome which may be different from the one they sought, but which they perceive to be well considered
- receiving a verbal or written apology
- achieving a change to a policy, procedure or practice that would prevent a recurrent of similar complaints

Resolution for the school may involve:

- reaching a compromise solution
- dismissing the complaint, e.g. if this decision accords with legislation or government policy or related workplace policy or procedures
- upholding the complaint and implementing a specific action, such as overturning a decision, giving an apology
- improving processes (i.e. changing procedures and workplace practices)
- increasing staff development training or performance improvement
- improving implementation of school policies and procedures (e.g. issuing updated documentation or reminders)
- taking other actions to ensure that the matter is handed appropriately in future.

Potential improvements that could be made to school policy, procedures or practices that would resolve the complaint and prevent a recurrence of similar complaints can be assessed and initiated by the principal and deputy principal.

Complaint escalation

Catholic schools in Victoria operate under a highly devolved model of governance where the parish priest or other relevant church authority is the legal employer and will have the ultimate decision-making authority over a complaint.

However, in each diocese, if a matter cannot be resolved at the school level, or if the complaint is about the principal of the school, complainants may contact the relevant Catholic Education Office or Regional Office for support and advice and the complaint will be handled in accordance with the respective **Catholic Education Office complaints policy**:

- Catholic Education Sandhurst: Complaints Policy
<http://www.ceosand.catholic.edu.au/key-documents/policies/103-ceo-sandhurst-policy-complaints-concerning-schools-dec-2016-1>

Procedures for managing complaints For Staff

Assessing and referring complaints

When a staff member receives a complaint, the complaint should be **acknowledged** and the complainant provided with a copy of the **school's complaints handling policy and procedures** in order to clearly establish expectations at an early stage of the process.

The following steps can be followed when deciding on the appropriate option for resolution.

Note: This process is not applicable in a complaint of a child protection nature, which must be addressed in accordance with child protection laws and reporting obligations (See PROTECT: Identifying and Reporting to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools).

STEPS	CONSIDERATIONS	ACTIONS
<p>1. Determine the seriousness of the complaint</p>	<p>Is there a need for urgent action, especially if there are health or safety concerns for any persons?</p> <p>Could the complaint have serious consequences for the parties concerned or others, resulting from a serious breach of legislation, school policy or procedure relating to issues which include but are not limited to :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learner discipline • bullying and harassment by learners against other students • Learner drug and alcohol issues • damage/loss of personal property • Learners requiring educational adjustment • Learner wellbeing <p>Is the issue complex and/or does it raise whole-school issues?</p> <p>Are the parties unlikely to agree to informal resolution?</p> <p>Is the complaint vexatious?</p> <p>Is there potential for the complaint to escalate?</p> <p>If the answer to any of these questions is YES, the matter can be considered as serious.</p> <p>If the answer to these questions is NO, the matter can be considered as less serious.</p>	<p>If the answer to any of these questions is YES consult the Principal or Deputy Principal. An investigation may be required.</p> <p>If the answer to these questions is NO, deal with the issue in the ordinary course of your role, using informal options for resolution, or refer the complaint to the Principal or Deputy Principal if you are unsure. <i>Refer to steps 2 and 3.</i></p>
<p>2. Record the complaint</p>	<p>All complaints should be recorded, even those which are perceived as trivial or minor issues (e.g. SIMON - Learner Profile: Behaviour Tracking - Parent Concern/ complaints register). This helps to identify key risk areas and any whole-school issues which, if not resolved, could lead to an escalated or more serious grievance or complaint. All communications, actions, notes from meetings and developments should be recorded, including the resolution and the closure date. Records must be securely and confidentially stored in accordance with the school's privacy policy.</p>	<p>Record the complaint in the secure management system or register, including the following information :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contact details of the complainant (i.e. parent/guardian) • date and method the complaint was communicated to the school (e.g. in person, phone call, email, letter, etc.) • nature of the complaint and requested resolution • staff member handling the issue • details of actions, communications and notes from meetings • statement of the outcome, including the closure date and the last correspondence

<p>3. Choose an option for the resolution of the complaint</p>	<p>Less serious complaints Minor grievances and complaints should be resolved closest to the source of the issue. Determine the most appropriate informal option for resolution :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • self resolution • supported self-resolution • facilitated mediation <p>Serious complaints Grievances and complaints deemed to be serious should be resolved as soon as possible using formal options. These may include :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • intervention • investigation <p>The appropriate process will be initiated by the Principal or Deputy Principal. At all times informal options such as facilitated mediation may be combined with formal options.</p>	<p>Select the appropriate option for resolving the complaint Where appropriate inform the Principal or Deputy Principal. Clarify with all parties involved which approach will be used and ensure the appropriate processes are in place.</p>
<p>4. Move to formal options when an informal option has not led to resolution of a less serious complaint.</p>	<p>For any matter which cannot be resolved by informal resolution, formal options will apply. They can be initiated by the Principal or Deputy Principal.</p>	<p>Refer the complaint to the Principal or Deputy Principal.</p>
<p>5. When formal options have not led to a resolution, refer the complaint further</p>	<p>If a matter cannot be resolved at the school level through formal or informal options, or if the complaint is about the Principal of the school, the complainant may be referred to the relevant Catholic Education Office or Regional Office or the relevant governing authority for the complaint to be dealt with in accordance with their complaints policy.</p>	<p>Refer the complainant to the Catholic Education Office or Regional Office or the relevant governing authority.</p>

Process for acknowledging complaints

1. Acknowledge the complaint promptly, whether formally or informally.
2. Establishes a clear timeline for investigating and responding to the complaint, where required and adheres to the timeline (2 business days).
3. Provides the complainant with the policy and procedures in order to clearly establish expectations at an early stage of the complaints handling process.