

Complaints & Grievances Resolution Policy

PREAMBLE:

Occasionally, there is a need for parents to raise concerns about practice or policy in schools. These concerns are generally addressed to all parties' satisfaction at the local level through informal means. Where this is not the case and a more formal structure is required, then the following procedures will be followed. In either case, these procedures aim to expeditiously resolve the complaint, while ensuring the parents, students and staff are not victimised and that the rights of teachers are not prejudiced. The objective of this policy is to resolve complaints as quickly and fairly as possible.

If the complaint relates to Child Sexual Assault or other abuse, the Principal will follow the procedures for the mandatory reporting via the PROTECT Protocol. The Principal will follow the directions as set out by the Reportable Conduct Scheme and contact Industrial Relations to be advised on the next course of action.

RATIONALE:

At St Paul's we are committed to providing a safe, inclusive and supportive environment for all members of the school community. This is characterised by fairness, mutual trust, respect and reconciliation. A safe, inclusive and supportive environment is developed when all members of a school community promote open communication, tolerance and positive relationships and embrace responsive, just and transparent processes. When clear preventative policies are applied consistently and issues that can give rise to complaints are identified early, matters can be resolved before they escalate.

This policy exists to implement procedures to safeguard the rights and acknowledge the responsibilities of all parties, should an unresolved grievance arise. If a parent or student has a complaint or concern which they believe has not been satisfactorily resolved at the level at which it has arisen, a grievance may exist. A resolution may be sought through informal discussions with the Principal, Chaplain, or delegate about the problem in order to come to a mutually acceptable and reasonable resolution, or through a formal grievance procedure.

St Paul's Catholic Primary School is a Restorative School. Staff is committed to the provision of procedural fairness and the resolution of grievances in a fair, reasonable and equitable manner within an atmosphere of mutual respect, dignity and compassion. The spirit of this policy is one of equity and justice. It is based on the belief that home and school form a partnership for the mutual benefit of children. It acknowledges that best procedures are those which involve the home, the school and the student in positive interaction.

IMPLEMENTATION:

- If parents wish to contact a member of staff to discuss any matters relating to their child's progress or situation at school, the best procedure is to contact the teacher involved, giving a brief outline of the purpose of the contact or meeting. Contact should be made using one of the following approaches:
 1. Parents may contact the school, either by phone or by coming to the office personally, and make arrangements for the teacher to make contact to organise a suitable meeting time. Teachers are not normally available to come to the phone or office during teaching time.
 2. Contact the appropriate teacher via email asking them to set up a suitable meeting time.
 3. Teachers require a reasonable amount of time, e.g. 36 hours, to respond to emails due to scheduled class time and professional requirements. Please note that teachers may not check or respond to emails during weekends or school holidays.
 4. Approach the appropriate teacher at a time when they are not teaching or on duty to arrange a suitable time to meet. Note that teaching staff are engaged in scheduled meetings after school on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.
- If parents have a concern or wish to discuss an issue about a child, situation or procedure within a particular level of the school, the best procedure is to approach the relevant teacher using one of the three approaches outlined above.
- If parents have a concern or wish to discuss an issue about a situation that they consider affects the whole school or relates to a school policy or procedure the best procedure is to approach the Principal, or the Deputy Principal, using one of the three approaches outlined above.
- If parents have a concern or wish to discuss an issue relating to a member of staff or of another sensitive nature, they should make direct contact with the Principal using one of the approaches above.
- In all cases, if the matter is urgent and/or relates to the possible risk of harm to a child, member of staff or member of the community, the Principal should be informed immediately and the urgency of the matter conveyed. The Principal will determine who is the most appropriate person to deal with the issue and will ensure that contact is made as soon as possible.

To Summarise:

In most cases the steps to be taken are as follows:

1. Contact the class teacher. If the matter is not resolved or is not appropriate for the teacher to address:
2. Contact the Principal or Deputy Principal.

Key elements of the complaints handling procedure:

- Complaints about school matters should be made to the Principal.
- Upon receipt of a written complaint or a transcribed oral one, the principal or other appropriate person is to:
 1. Discuss the issue with the person who is the subject of the complaint
 2. Provide a copy of the written complaint to the persons concerned (if appropriate)
 3. Clarify the issues of complaint and allow a right of reply

4. Investigate and discuss options for resolution with all parties
 5. Decide on the option deemed to be most appropriate
 6. Implement a decision and provide feedback to all concerned
- To be effective, St Paul's Primary School will deal with complaints sensitively, promptly and confidentially. Matters will be resolved as soon as possible and in a way which treats all parties with dignity and respect.
 - If a satisfactory outcome is not achieved, further conciliation may take place in an effort to resolve any outstanding matters. On the rare occasion where a resolution is unlikely, a decision will be made by the Principal with the best learning outcome for all students considered paramount.
 - Anonymous complaints are not accepted or acted upon.
 - Please note: Parents should not approach the children of other families with a school-related complaint nor should they approach the children of other families with a non-school related complaint on school grounds. This is often a sensitive area and in order to protect all parties it is advisable to work through the relevant teacher or Principal.

Informal Resolution Process:

- In less serious matters in which there is no risk of harm to any person, those involved will be encouraged to deal with the issue personally. Normally this would mean that the relevant people would discuss the issue of concern with a view to reaching an amicable resolution.

Procedure to be Implemented When Matters Are Not Satisfactorily Resolved at Local Level:

- In the case of a formal complaint against the Principal, the complainant should contact the Director of the Catholic Education Office Melbourne. Should this occur, the Director or his delegate will implement the following steps:
 1. Notify the Parish Priest of the complaint
 2. Clarify that the complainant has made contact with the school. That the matter has been aired and a reasonable hearing obtained
 3. Review the current source of dissatisfaction
 4. Request this be presented in writing
 5. Consult with all parties in an endeavour to resolve the issues
 6. Provide feedback to all parties regarding the resolution of the complaint

Points to Be Kept In Mind:

- To order to gain a mutually acceptable resolution of grievances in a fair, reasonable and equitable manner within an atmosphere of mutual respect, dignity and compassion, the focus should be on conciliation. This may be achieved by facilitating a meeting or meetings between the relevant parties or by discussing the issue with the parties separately. Other individuals who may be able to assist should be consulted.

Resolution:

- Typically, the outcomes of successful conciliation may be that:
 - The parties resolve their differences
 - The complaint is withdrawn

- A reasonable compromise is agreed upon
 - A verbal or written apology;
 - Disciplinary action;
 - Review of policy or procedures.
- On rare occasions where resolution is unlikely, a decision will be made with the best learning outcome for all students considered paramount. This is ultimately a school/parish decision.
 - If a complaint is not upheld or not substantiated (e.g. there is insufficient evidence) but some issues come out of the investigation that are required to be addressed then, possible outcomes include:
 - Relevant training for employees and/or students;
 - Monitoring of the behaviour of employees and/or students;
 - Counselling for the aggrieved person;
 - Mediation at the local level.
 - If the complaint is proved not to have happened at all, or if there is evidence that the complaint was made with the main purpose or intent of causing distress to the other named as the source of the grievance, the following are possible outcomes:
 - Counselling for the person who made the complaint;
 - A written apology from the person who made the complaint;
 - An official warning;
 - Referral for disciplinary action for students and staff;
 - The relevant designated person will make sure that whatever outcome is decided upon actually occurs.

Appeals:

There are three avenues of appeal if it is believed that the complaints procedure has not been followed properly, or that the outcome is unacceptable.

Appeals At School Level

Appeals at school level are to be referred to the Principal, if he/she has not been involved in investigating or examining the complaints, or is not the person named as the source of the grievance. If the Principal has been involved, the appeal should be referred to the Manager at the Eastern Region Catholic Education Office.

The appeal will consider:

- The way the complaint was handled and examine the outcome;
- If he/she believes it was handled properly and that the outcome was appropriate he/she will take no further action;
- If he/she thinks that the complaint was not handled properly, or that the outcome was inappropriate, he/she will organise for the complaint to be looked at again.

Appeals at Catholic Education Office Level

To the Director of the Catholic Education Office Melbourne

To An External Agency

A complainant may at any stage choose to take their complaint directly to an external agency such as the Victorian Institute of Teaching, Victorian Equal Opportunity Commission, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission or the Ombudsman, the Victorian Registration & Qualifications Authority.

Record Keeping:

Records of complaints, interviews and other documentation relating to a complaint are kept at the school (when dealt with at school level) in a separate secure complaints file. If the complaint is about a person, documents are placed in a restricted access file. If there are any serious ongoing management or care issues relating to a complaint, there will need to be a cross-reference to the restricted file on the staff member or student file.

Key Elements of the Complaints and Grievances Policy:

- Impartiality – when a complaint is made, it will be investigated in a fair and impartial manner.
- Confidentiality – all complaints will remain confidential.
- No victimisation – the complainant or their family will not be victimised in any way.
- Anonymous complaints/criticisms will not be accepted.
- Vexatious or malicious complaints – there is an underlying assumption that complaints are made in good faith and with an intention for resolution not retribution.
- Timeliness – each complaint/suggestion will be finalised within as short a period of time as possible.

Harassment:

Staff are advised to contact the Principal to seek support and/or advice concerning an incident of harassment.

EVALUATION:

- This policy will be reviewed as part of St Paul’s Policy Review Schedule.

History of Updates to Policy

Date	Comment (e.g. major review, minor review)
2011	Written and ratified
2019	Updated and ratified