

Complaints and Grievances Policy

Rationale

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School is committed to providing a safe and supportive learning environment. From time to time, students and parents can sometimes feel aggrieved about something that is happening at the school that they believe requires attention, further investigation or change in procedures or a resolution.

Policy Statement

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School is committed to implementing processes in which complaints are managed and resolved fairly and timely.

Principles

- The complaints resolution procedure is implemented for resolving complaints in relation to issues that fall within the school's area of responsibility.
- All cases of serious professional misconduct: sexual offences, criminal charges, or other serious incidents must be referred to the relevant regulator or authority.
- The principal has a responsibility to address unacceptable conduct or concerns that are observed or brought to the school's attention.
- Procedures for handling complaints will ensure there is procedural fairness throughout the process.
- It is important that all complaints, ensuing procedures and outcomes are fully documented and confidentiality is maintained.
- The principal may choose to respond to a complaint through an informal process in cases where the complaint is minor, the complainant wishes the matter to be dealt with informally or the complaint has arisen from lack of or unclear communication.
- Formal processes will be used when informal processes have not been successful, a complainant seeks a formal process, or the principal believes the complaint warrants formal investigation.
- This policy will be made available on the school's website and listed in the Parent Handbook.

Complaints and Grievances Procedure

In the first instance, complainants should contact the person/s involved in the issue when it first arises so that it can be resolved quickly. In many cases this would involve the classroom teacher in the resolution of the complaint even if the complaint was not directly about them. The types of complaints could include:

- issues related to student behaviour management procedures
- issues related to learning and teaching or student wellbeing

- damage/loss of personal property
- student wellbeing such as bullying or harassment

Concerns about your child could be addressed by:

1. writing a note to the relevant teacher outlining your concerns and providing a contact number for the teacher to contact you for further information or follow up. This contact will usually be outside of classroom times.
2. making an appointment to speak on the phone or in person with the teacher, ensuring that you inform the school about the issue you wish to discuss. Contacting the administration office can facilitate this. It is important to remember that teachers cannot always meet with you just before and after class times due to other responsibilities and meetings.

The teacher, together with any others who may be involved such as the child's classroom teacher, should be given a reasonable amount of time to take the steps required to resolve or address your concerns. Remember, it may not always be possible to resolve an issue to your complete satisfaction.

If the matter is urgent and the teacher is not available, then contact the administration office to arrange for a member of the leadership team or other suitable staff member to either meet or contact you.

Raising Concerns with Principal

Most concerns are resolved by discussing the issue with the relevant person. However, if the issue remains unresolved you can then ask to see the principal.

To do this, you will need to request an appointment through the administration office. Please note that:

- the principal may ask another senior staff member to speak with you on their behalf
- if a teacher is going to be present at the meeting, it is more likely to occur outside of classroom hours

If your concern is related to issues of school policy, these should be raised more formally (in writing) with the principal.

Maintaining a Safe Environment

At any stage in the complaint process, staff have the right to feel safe. Aggressive or abusive behaviour will not be tolerated. In such instances, the staff member will end the meeting and refer the matter to the principal and the school's occupational health and safety officer.

If the complainant feels unsafe, they should end the meeting and refer the matter to the principal. In the case of it being the principal, then the complainant should contact the governing authority.

Raising Concerns with Governing Authority or Catholic Education Office

Complaints are to be raised in the first instance with the school unless it is a serious issue regarding the principal. The school processes need to be followed.

If the complainant after meeting with the principal believes that the school has not listened to their concerns or followed school processes then the complainant can take the issue to the school governing authority or Catholic Education Office (CEO) Ballarat. It is important to note that the school will make decisions that are not always accepted by all the school community.

If a complainant believes that they have not been treated fairly or the result was not satisfactory, depending on the issue, the complainant can contact other agencies such as Worksafe.

The Department of Education and Training Victoria (DET) and the other Catholic education offices such as Catholic Education Melbourne do not investigate parent concerns related to schools in the Diocese of Ballarat.

It is an expectation that the complaint is respectful and reasonable and that the complainant cooperates with any process that is put in place. The governing authority or the CEO Ballarat may terminate any investigation or consideration of the matter if the complainant becomes unreasonable, aggressive or obstructs the process.

Confidentiality

The person who is dealing with your complaint will advise you if confidentiality applies to your complaint. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. If your complaint is about another person, they have a right to know that the complaint has been made about them and be given a chance to respond.

Making, Receiving and Investigating Complaints

At St Thomas More Catholic Primary School, all staff are expected to:

- listen carefully and deal calmly and respectfully with complaints
- document the complaint, actions taken and outcomes
- look at all sides of an issue
- focus particularly on issues that may be affecting the learning and/or safety of students
- resolve complaints in a timely manner
- provide feedback to the complainant on any actions/outcomes/decisions taken
- accept that it is not possible to resolve all complaints
- identify when a complaint cannot be resolved
- ensure privacy and confidentiality of information is maintained in accordance with relevant legislation
- refer more complex or unresolved complaints to the principal or the school governing authority

Those making complaints are expected to:

- be clear about the topic or issue to be discussed
- focus on the things that are genuinely affecting your child
- always remain calm and respectful, particularly when discussing the complaint in the presence of children
- remember you may not have all the facts relating to the circumstances of the topic or issue you wish to discuss
- think about what would be an acceptable outcome for you and your child that is consistent with school policy and procedures
- listen carefully to other sides of the issue
- be informed by checking the school's policies or guidelines, where relevant
- understand that follow up consequences or actions for others cannot be disclosed
- accept that it is not possible to resolve all complaints

- be aware that you have the right to seek advocacy, mediation, counseling or support. This should be discussed with the school.

Record Keeping

A record of a complaint should include the following detail:

- Date when issue was first raised
- Name of parent(s)
- Name of student(s)
- Detailed statement of concern/complaint including:
 - nature of complaint
 - identity of person(s)involved
 - time of allegation
 - description of the procedures applied and the time frame for reporting on the outcomes of any investigation
 - statement of outcomes
 - staff member(s) handling complaint

The record of complaint will be filed in school records management system.

Policy Updated: 2018

Policy Review: 2022

Governing Authority Ratification Date: June 2018