

Complaints Policy

Introduction

Catholic schools strive to be communities of faith, hope and love where communication takes place in an environment of transparency, respect, fairness, inclusion and a Christian concern for all.

Within the reality of the school 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.

Rationale

Governments and the community expect schools to have in place best practice procedures to manage grievances and complaints. Schools are required to have complaints management policies and procedures in place with respect to the minimum standard of student welfare. The VRQA Guidelines for Registration of Schools¹ indicate that *'there must be evidence in the form of the school's policies and procedures with respect to managing complaints or grievances'*. Schools are also required to make their policy and procedures for the resolution of complaints publicly available to the school community (on their website or in the newsletter).

Having an effective complaints management process within a school:

- enhances staff relationships with parents, students and the broader school community
- encourages the resolution of concerns and disputes at the earliest possible stage
- creates expectations that the complaints management process will be respectful and courteous
- avoids escalation of vexatious or frivolous complaints
- empowers staff by giving them a clear path to resolve issues in a consistent, systematic and responsive way
- enables valuable feedback about where the school is not meeting parents' and students' needs
- ensures that a school complies with its legal obligations
- assists a school to continually improve its internal systems and controls
- protects and enhances a school's reputation.
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Definition and Scope

This policy provides advice on how to respond to general complaints and grievances raised by parents, guardians, carers and students (complainants) so that all parties can reach a positive resolution.

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.

¹ **Victorian Registrations and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) Guidelines to the minimum standards and other requirements for Registration for Schools** (2016, p12)

The dissatisfaction will usually arise from a perception that the school has:

- done something wrong
- failed to do something it should have
- acted unfairly or inappropriately.

The complaint may be about an individual staff member, a student or a policy or procedure. Examples may include issues related to:

- student discipline procedures
- learning and teaching
- students requiring educational adjustment
- damage/loss of personal property
- bullying and harassment by students against other students.

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 conditions. 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 2013 \(VCEMEA\)](#).

Child Protection Procedures

Nothing in this policy replaces a school's obligations to comply with the legal requirements and procedures that relate to mandatory reporting and managing the risk of child abuse under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (Vic.), the *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic.), the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (Vic.), *Children Legislation Amendment (Reportable Conduct) Act 2017* (Vic.) and Ministerial Order No. 870 – *Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools* made under the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (Vic.). Schools must abide by the professional, moral and legal obligations to implement child protection and child safety policies, protocols and practices within their school.

If, in the course of carrying out their duties, a mandatory reporter forms a reasonable belief that a child is in need of protection from physical harm or sexual abuse, and that the **child's parents are unwilling or unable to protect the child**, they must report that belief to the Department of Health and Human Services/Child Protection and/or Victoria Police as described in the joint Protocol: [PROTECT: Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools](#).

Staff must use the [Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse](#) if they form a suspicion or reasonable belief that child abuse has occurred, or that a child is at risk of suffering abuse. Staff members are to keep clear and comprehensive notes relating to incidents, disclosures and allegations of child abuse using the [Responding to Suspected Child Abuse: A Template for all Victorian Schools](#).

References

[PROTECT: Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools](#)

[Victorian Catholic Education Multi Enterprise Agreement 2013 \(VCEMEA\)](#)

[Victorian Registrations and Qualifications Authority \(VRQA\) Guidelines to the minimum standards and other requirements for Registration for Schools \(2016, p12\)](#)

Review

This policy will be reviewed in May 2021.