



# COMPLAINTS POLICY

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## INTRODUCTION

At Catholic College Wodonga we are committed to building a school culture that features child safe, positive and respectful relationships. As a Catholic school, these relationships are grounded in the values of the gospel, in particular the values of justice, compassion, reconciliation, truth and love. In keeping with Catholic social teaching, a respect for the innate dignity of each person shapes all our relationships.

In building and nurturing this child safe culture, we acknowledge that students and parents can sometimes feel aggrieved about something that is happening at the school. Every member of our school community has a right to have their grievance or complaint, including the handling of child safety processes, addressed, and we will work positively and resolutely to achieve a satisfactory outcome for the people involved.

This policy outlines our principles and procedures for receiving and resolving complaints. It ought to be read in conjunction with related policies and core documents of the school, namely:

- Child Safe Policy and related child protection policies
- Bullying Prevention and Intervention Policy (Students)
- Student Management & Engagement Policy
- Pastoral Wellbeing Policy
- Equal Employment Opportunity and Anti-Discrimination Policy
- Occupation Health & Safety Policy
- Parent/Carer Code of Conduct
- Internal Grievance Resolution Procedures (Staff)
- Bullying (Staff) Policy
- Victorian Institute of Teaching Profession Code of Conduct and Professional Standards

## COMPLAINTS RESOLUTION — GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In receiving and responding to complaints, the following guiding principles will direct and shape the school's actions:

- We will work with the complainant with respect, courtesy and openness and with a genuine desire to achieve fair and reasonable decisions.
- The complaint will be resolved as quickly as possible.
- Confidentiality, impartiality and the principles of natural justice will form the basis of our complaints resolution process.
- The person(s) facing the complaint will be provided with detailed information about the substance of the complaint and will have the opportunity to respond.
- Personal information disclosed will be treated as confidential.
- Our resolution process will be grounded in sound and fair procedures for information sharing, conciliation, investigation and decision making.

- If a satisfactory outcome cannot be achieved, the school will provide the complainant with options for having the decision reviewed or mediated via an external authority.
- The communal needs of the school community will in most instances exceed the needs of any individual.

## EXPECTATIONS OF PEOPLE MAKING A COMPLAINT

In making a complaint, the school requests and expects that the complainant will:

- raise the concern or complaint as soon as possible after the issue has arisen
- communicate and respond in ways that are constructive, fair and respectful
- provide complete and factual information about the concern or complaint
- observe confidentiality and a respect for sensitive issues
- act in good faith to achieve an outcome acceptable to all parties
- have realistic and reasonable expectations about possible outcomes/remedies.

If as a complainant you are a parent, and your concern/complaint relates to your child's treatment by another student or students while at school, the school expects that you will refer your complaint directly to the school, via your child's class teacher, Learning Mentor or Learning Community Leader. Under no circumstances should you approach another student while in the care of the school to discuss the issue or chastise him or her. Direct contact with parents to resolve the matter is also discouraged if the complaint pertains to issues or incidents that have arisen at the school.

## PROCEDURES

### Key Referral People

Complainants are encouraged to make contact with members of the school staff who are most closely connected with the complaint/concern. For parents, this will be your child's class teacher, Learning Mentor or Learning Community Leader.

If there is any uncertainty about the most appropriate person to address a concern or complaint, you are encouraged to contact the school. Reception staff will refer you to the appropriate person or a member of the Executive Team.

The Executive Team consists of:

- Principal
- Deputy Principal – Staff
- Deputy Principal – Student Development
- Deputy Principal – Learning, Teaching & Innovation
- Business Manager

### Email Communications and Teaching Staff

Due to teachers' classroom and supervision duties, a complainant's first contact is best made by email, with an appointment request for either a phone conference or face-to-face meeting. Complainants are asked to outline concerns or issues (e.g. learning program, discipline, student/peer incidents) so that the staff member can prepare for the meeting/phone conference.

**Complainants and staff are strongly discouraged from sending or discussing confidential, contentious and/or emotional information via email. These matters are best discussed face-to-face or over the phone.**

### Informal and Formal Resolution Processes

If initial communication between the parties does not resolve the complaint (an 'informal' resolution process), then the complainant should:

- contact the principal or a member of the Executive Team to make an appointment for either a phone conference or a face-to-face meeting;
- outline the nature of the complaint, either verbally or in writing, and the steps taken to resolve it.

In moving to a more formal process, the principal or a member of the Executive Team will:

- organise a meeting/phone conference
- fully document the complaint, any actions taken to resolve it and outcomes of those actions
- further and fully investigate the matter
- ensure that no one is victimised as a result of a complaint being made
- if necessary, enable a complainant to be accompanied by another person of his/her choice as a support person
- enable the person against whom the complaint has been made to respond, and to be accompanied to any meeting by another person of his/her choice as a support person
- organise a process of mediation if a complaint cannot be satisfactorily resolved by the school.

### Serious or Repeated Complaints, or Allegations of Misconduct

Where a complaint relates to an allegation of physical, emotional or sexual abuse, or when complaints are sufficiently serious or repeated, the principal will take action to report the matter to the appropriate authorities, ensure a comprehensive investigation, and work with all parties to facilitate a resolution.

**Complaints of a child protection nature will be addressed in accordance with child protection laws and reporting obligations (see PROTECT: Identifying and Responding to all Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools).**

## POSSIBLE OUTCOMES

If the complaint is substantiated, the following are possible outcomes:

- A written apology
- An official warning
- Counselling/training
- Mediation
- Disciplinary action
- Dismissal/expulsion

If the complaint is inconclusive (not enough evidence), possible outcomes are:

- Relevant training for staff and/or students
- Mediation between the parties to improve the working relationship
- Monitoring of behaviour of staff and/or students

If the complaint is proven not to have happened at all, the following are possible outcomes:

- Counselling for the person who made the complaint;
- A written apology
- An official warning
- Disciplinary action
- Dismissal /expulsion

### Vexatious Claims

The College will not deal with complaints that:

- Are made anonymously, without sufficient detail being provided so as to allow investigation or resolution of the matter;
- Taken at their highest, do not constitute discrimination, sexual harassment or victimization.
- Where a complainant makes frivolous, vexatious or malicious claims against a Respondent, for example, where false or misleading information is provided, relevant information is withheld, facts are distorted or there is not demonstrated commitment to resolution, then depending on the circumstance, disciplinary action may be taken against a Complainant.

## CONFIDENTIALITY

You can feel secure that if you do make a complaint under this policy, it will remain as confidential as is possible. The only people who will have access to information about the complaint will be the person whom the complaint is reported to, the Principal and/or the relevant member of the Executive Team, the person accused and any relevant witnesses.

### Recording Complaints

All complaints will be recorded and stored in our records management system which protects the privacy of the individuals concerned and which contains full details of the complaint and actions taken to resolve the matter.

### Impartiality

If you make a complaint, it will be investigated in a fair and impartial manner. No judgments or assumptions will be made and no action will be taken until the investigation is complete. If a complaint is made against you, your rights will be protected and you will be given an opportunity to tell your side of the story.

### Timeliness

Each complaint will be finalised within as short a period as possible. All complaints should be finalised within one month.

## AVENUES OF APPEAL

If a complaint remains unresolved, or if the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcomes, the complainant has the right to seek other avenues of appeal through authorities such as the Catholic Education Office, Victorian Independent Education Union (VIEU), the Parish Priest, Equal Opportunity Commission or other agency.