



# ST. JOSEPH'S PRIMARY SCHOOL

## Policy Document



## Managing Complaints and Grievances Policy

### 2020

### COMMITMENT TO CHILD SAFETY

*All students enrolled, and any child visiting, have a right to feel safe and be safe all of the time. The wellbeing of children in our care will always be our first priority and we have zero tolerance for child abuse.*

*At St Joseph's Primary School we strive to maintain a child safe and child friendly environment where children feel safe and are free to enjoy life to the full without any concern for their safety. We are committed to continually reviewing our Child Safe policies and practices to ensure that every effort is made for ongoing improvement of our Child Safe environment. We at St Joseph's Primary School recognise that some groups of children are particularly vulnerable and we are committed to promoting the cultural safety of Aboriginal/linguistically diverse children and also promoting the safety of children with a disability.*

### BASIC BELIEFS

- Our School is built on respect and an appreciation of individual differences
- In "Never seeing a need without doing something about it" (St Mary MacKillop)

### INTRODUCTION

St Joseph's Primary School is committed to providing a safe and supportive working and learning environment for all members of the school community. To achieve this the school fosters trusting and cooperative relationships where regular, open and constructive communication between all stakeholders is encouraged. The school acknowledges that misunderstandings and differences of opinion may occur from time to time and that these need to be resolved in a satisfactory manner for all parties. St Joseph's Primary School has developed a framework for resolving complaints and grievance in a dignified and respectful manner.

St Joseph's Primary School is committed to resolving all complaints promptly at a school level, in a non-judgemental manner where staff, parents and students are treated fairly and given ample opportunity to present their views. Where staff, parents or students are dissatisfied with the school's response or feel that the complaint remains unresolved, they may seek further resolution via the Sandhurst Catholic Education Office.

### AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the school's Complaints & Grievances Policy is to establish clear guidelines for responding to and resolving concerns raised by individuals.

This policy does not apply;

- To critical incidents, emergency management, criminal offences, conduct of religious clergy or other religious individuals.

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- Complaints 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).

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### DEFINITION

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A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with an action taken, decision made, service provided or handling of an issue at St Joseph's.

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.

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

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### IMPLEMENTATION

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#### Making a Complaint:

Where an individual is dissatisfied with action taken, decisions made or educational services provided a complaint can be made to the school in person, via the phone or in writing or email.

Prior to making a formal complaint the school encourages the complainant to raise their concern or issue with the relevant staff member in an attempt to resolve the issue.

The complaint should be made to the following stakeholders dependant on circumstance:

- The Student's Teacher where it relates to teaching and learning issues or incidents that occur in their class or group.
- The Year Level Coordinator if students from several classes are involved.
- The Principal or a member of the Leadership Team where an issue or concern relates to a staff member or complex student issues.
- The Principal about issues relating to school policy or school management.
- The Principal about issues relating to students or other families.

Complainants can seek the services of an advocate when they feel they are unable to express their concern clearly. An advocate can be a friend or someone who is available through an appropriate support organisation who does not receive a fee for service.

All parties involved in addressing a complaint may seek the services of a mediator when there is difficulty coming to an agreement.

#### Parent Expectation

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School expects parents raising concerns or complaints to:

- Do so promptly, as soon as possible after the issue occurs or the concern has been realised;

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- Provide complete and factual information about the concern or complaint, preferably in writing or via email;
- Maintain and respect the privacy and confidentiality of all parties;
- Acknowledge that a common goal is to achieve an outcome acceptable to all parties;
- Act in good faith, and in a calm and courteous manner;
- Show respect and understanding of differing points of view and value difference, rather than judging and blaming;
- Recognise that all parties have rights and responsibilities which must be balanced.

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School will not tolerate parents who approach children from other families with a school related complaint. In the interests of safety and respect for all within the school community, parents must bring their concerns or complaints to the relevant Staff Member, or the Principal to ensure that an appropriate resolution can be achieved.

### **Initial Response to Complaints**

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School will make all reasonable efforts to promptly respond and resolve complaints made by any member of the school community.

### **Addressing Complaints**

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School may choose to consider either an informal or more formal approach to addressing complaints. The school will generally, in the first instance, choose an informal approach 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 a possible misunderstanding, miscommunication or lack of clarity about the issue in question by a support person such as the Principal, a member of the Leadership Team, a colleague, or counsellor providing professional advice or support.

### **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.

#### Facilitated mediation

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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, the principal, a member of the Leadership Team or a counsellor.

### **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. This may also involve relevant members of the Catholic Education Office.

### **Complaint Escalation**

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.

### **Complaint Resolution**

Where a concern or complaint is substantiated in whole or part and a resolution has been agreed upon, the school will offer an appropriate response. This may include, but not be limited to the following:

- An explanation or further information about the issue;
- Mediation, counselling or other support;
- An apology, expression of regret or admission of fault;
- To change its decision;
- To change its policies, procedures or practices;
- To cancel a debt (such as for school payments);
- A fee refund.

### **Complaints Against Teachers & Staff Members**

The nature of the complaint will determine who is the most appropriate person or body to manage a complainant's concerns.

### **Misconduct**

All complaints of alleged misconduct or serious misconduct by a teacher or staff member should be reported to the Principal of the school. Complaints about teachers can also be reported to the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) and the relevant Catholic Education Office, which is the regulator in relation to the registration and investigation of serious misconduct (including conduct which is of a physical or emotional nature) of all teachers in the state of Victoria.

In some cases, certain actions which involve physical or emotional misconduct, such as unlawful assault or threats to the person, may constitute a criminal offence. These types of offences should be reported to and investigated by the police. Initial consultation with the principal of the school may help to determine the appropriate course of action in these circumstances.

### **Complaints Against the School Principal**

In the case of complaints involving the principal, which forms part of a parish, the Parish Priest ('the employer') and the manager of the relevant Catholic Education Office which oversees that school should be informed immediately.

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# Complaint & Grievances Flowchart

