



COMPLAINTS & GRIEVANCES POLICY

Policy

This policy describes the process for effectively managing complaints whilst protecting the right of all parties involved and seeking solution to the problem in the best interests of all affected. A commitment to respond positively to critical feedback ensures that people have the opportunity to contribute to the continued improvement of the school. It is expected that all staff will demonstrate a commitment to ensuring that a culture of consultation and open dialogue is nurtured at every level, giving every member of the school community the opportunity to express dissatisfaction as well as satisfaction. Complaints need to be addressed responsively, openly and in a timely manner to increase levels of satisfaction and to maintain harmonious relations in the wider community. Staff should be encouraged to develop an open expectation of a cooperative and genuine effort to resolve any valid complaint.

Definitions

Complaint: An expression of dissatisfaction with the service provided, a decision made or the performance of staff.

Complainant: A student, parent or community member making a complaint.

Procedures

The procedures following outline the three major components for handling complaints:

- Intake of complaints
- Management of complaints
- Resolution of complaints.

Complaints which may involve reportable allegations (Child Protection complaints) must be resolved in accordance with Child Protection – ACT Policy.

Intake of Complaints

What can a complaint be about?

A complaint can be about:

- Any aspect of the service provided by St Andrew's Primary School, the behaviour or decisions of the principal and/or school staff.
- Policies or procedures.
- Other relevant issues.

Who can make a complaint?

- Any person with a relevant interest in or connection to St Andrew's Primary School can make a complaint, including a student, parent or caregiver, a community member, any employee, contractor or volunteer.

- Complaints may be made by third parties (such as solicitors or support persons) representing complainants.
- Complainants with special needs should as far as practicable be offered reasonable assistance to make their complaint.

Who can receive a complaint?

Any school employee can be informed of a complaint.

In general, the complaint is made where the problem occurred unless there are concerns about conflict of interests, or the complaint concerns the local principal, or school leader, in which case the complaint is made to another staff member or to Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM) directly.

Persons receiving complaints must:

- be respectful and helpful;
- give the person their undivided attention;
- not be defensive or apportion blame;
- remain positive; and
- avoid perceiving anger as a personal attack.

When a staff member receives a verbal complaint they:

- listen carefully to the issues being raised;
- summarise the issues to clarify and check that they understand;
- where appropriate empathise and acknowledge feelings, without commenting or agreeing on the substance of the complaint;
- tell the complainant that they may use the support of a third party in progressing the complaint;
- assure the complainant that an appropriate staff member will address their complaint; and
- tell the complainant what will happen with their complaint.

When recording a complaint received verbally, staff:

- use objective language clearly stating the facts;
- place information in chronological order;
- use clear, explicit, unambiguous language, as close to the language used by the complainant as possible;
- do not add any details;
- do not use any language which indicates a bias; and
- document the interview.

Written complaints will be acknowledged in writing within five working days. Complaints received through a solicitor, legal advisor or insurer, or other complaints of a potentially litigious nature are referred to the appropriate officer at the CEM immediately. Many complaints or issues can be resolved informally at school level. However, appropriate practice and procedure in dealing with complaints must be clearly communicated to the school community, especially for situations which are more complex.

At St Andrew's Primary School, the process is as follows:

- If a parent or student wishes to make a complaint, verbal or written, an interview with the teacher, Principal or Assistant Principal is made to address particular concerns.
- Records of interviews and meetings and all documentation of the process, procedures followed and resolution, are taken and kept.

While parent complaints are to be dealt with at school level initially, in situations where no resolution is achieved, or where the concern is in regard to systemic policy or practice, a complaint can be made in writing to the Director of the Catholic Education Office.

Normally, all complaints should be handled by staff with no links to the issue of concern, using a fair, unbiased manner to facilitate transparency and objective assessment of the situation under consideration. The person about whom a complaint is made must be given the opportunity to respond to the complaint. Complaints should be monitored by the Principal to track the nature, frequency and resolution details for future reference.

Management of Complaints

What happens when a complaint is received?

Most minor complaints are resolved informally with the relevant employee without delay. Should a complaint be made formally, a more systematic approach is adopted. Generally, the more serious the complaint, the more systematic is the response. An employee who receives a complaint determines whether it is a matter that can be resolved informally or whether it should be referred to a senior staff member, Principal or the CEM. If in doubt, an employee receiving a complaint confers with a senior staff member or the CEM to determine this. Complainants are kept informed of progress towards resolving the complaint. Obligations around privacy and confidentiality are kept in mind when keeping complainants informed. If a conflict of interest arises for a staff member involved in the receipt or management of a complaint, the principal or staff member is informed and alternate arrangements are made; for example, when a person tasked with dealing with a complaint is a good friend or family member of a person about whom a complaint is made. More serious complaints or those which remain unresolved are best handled by personnel with no links to the issue in a fair, unbiased manner to facilitate transparency and objective assessment. In all situations, persons managing complaints should be as neutral as possible. A complaint about a school Principal is referred directly to the Parish Priest or CEM. Complaints that may involve reportable allegations or Child Safety breaches must be resolved in accordance with Victorian Reportable Conduct Scheme Policies. Appropriate practice and procedure in dealing with complaints is clearly communicated to the school community, especially for situations which are more complex.

School policies include:

- procedures to be followed for an interview with the person designated as the first point of contact for addressing particular complaints (this is usually the Principal, Assistant Principal or a teacher);
- procedures to be followed if a formal complaint is directed against a teacher;
- requirements for complaints to be put in writing if a resolution cannot be reached through an interview;

- procedures relating to situations where no satisfactory outcome is achieved and where the matter needs to be taken to the CEM; and
- requirements for record-keeping and documentation of the process, procedures followed and resolution.

While parent complaints are normally dealt with at school level initially, in situations where no resolution is achieved, or where the concern is in regard to Systemic policy or practice, a complaint may be made in writing to the Director of the Catholic Education Office. The person about whom a complaint is made is given the opportunity to respond to the complaint. The form of response will be commensurate with the seriousness of the complaint, as part of the complaint management process. For minor issues, a verbal response is usually adequate. The complaint handler will normally make a file note of the response. For more serious issues, a response should be made in writing. Vexatious or previously finalised issues are not pursued however staff are to be discerning and prudent, and careful not to dismiss complaints out of hand. Complaints may appear, initially, to be a repeated account of a finalised matter, but may in fact be new or contain relevant new aspects. Complaints may sound vexatious initially, but have some substance. Staff involved in recording complaints are to be wary of making hasty decisions and dismissing complaints without due consideration.

Anonymous complaints

St Andrew's Primary School may receive anonymous complaints. It is extremely difficult to action such complaints as the testimony of complainants is usually a key component. If the complainant cannot be identified, appropriate follow up is not possible. No action is taken on anonymous complaints except in exceptional circumstances. If in doubt, schools refer anonymous complaints to the CEO. When an anonymous complaint is received the complainant is told of the limitations associated with making an anonymous complaint. Confidentiality Staff dealing with a complaint protect the confidentiality and privacy of those involved by ensuring relevant information is accessible only to those with a genuine need to know. Some information about a complaint may need to be disclosed to others during its resolution, but this will be done with the utmost discretion. Complainants should be confident that there will be no discriminatory action taken against them as a result of a complaint being lodged, there may be action in line with a reasonable agreed outcome.

Resolution of Complaints

Positive resolution of a complaint aims to:

- seek resolution at the level at which the complaint is made;
- consider all relevant information and views of all parties;
- consider CE policies and legal requirements; and
- assist in improving service outcomes in CE schools.

Staff dealing with complaints aim to resolve them as expeditiously as possible, without compromising the quality of any investigation into the complaint.

The response to the issues raised by the complainant is delivered in a non-judgemental, non-threatening, professional and courteous manner.

Apart from exceptional circumstances the person or persons about whom the complaint is made usually has the right to be advised of the identity of the complainant.

The resolution to a complaint is delivered in a manner appropriate to the gravity of the issue. Therefore, serious complaints, or those initially received in writing, would normally receive a

statement that the matter has been resolved, and the way in which it has been resolved, in writing.

The full details of the investigation are not included in the resolution. Complainants seeking such details are told that they will not receive a full account of the investigation. Complainants who insist on receiving these details are referred to the CEM.

In general terms complaints are monitored to track the details of the nature, frequency and resolution of the complaint for future reference and enhancement of school services and policies.