



# **PARENTAL COMPLAINTS AND COMMUNICATIONS POLICY**

## **St Roch's Parish Primary School**

### **RATIONALE**

At St Roch's Parish Primary School (**School**), we are committed to building a school culture that welcomes feedback and features 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 culture, we acknowledge that it is in the best interest of students for there to be a trusting and cooperative relationship between Parents/Guardians and the School. Every member of our School community has a right to have their concerns addressed and we will endeavour to work positively and resolutely to achieve a satisfactory outcome for all involved.

Complaints are an important way for the School community to provide information and feedback to the School. The School welcomes complaints and considers that every complaint provides a valuable opportunity for reflection and learning.

The School recognises the rights of Parents/Guardians to voice their concerns and its responsibility to provide a framework within which efforts can be made to resolve them. This Parental Complaints and Communications Policy (Policy) outlines the School's principles and procedures for receiving and resolving complaints. It should be read in conjunction with related policies and documents of the School, namely:

- *Child Safety Policy*
- *Wellbeing Policy*
- *Behaviour Support Policy*
- *Anti-Bulling Policy*

### **PURPOSE & SCOPE**

The purpose of this Policy is to ensure:

- the School meets its obligation to respond to complaints in a fair, effective and efficient manner; and
- Parents/Guardians are informed of how they can make a complaint.

This Policy covers all students enrolled at the School.

This policy does not apply to matters where rights and processes for review and appeal already exist. These include:

- student expulsions
- complaints about staff, including reportable conduct, that if upheld would constitute misconduct
- student critical incidents
- other criminal matters.

This Policy aligns with the requirement under the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 for the School to have in place a policy and procedure with respect to managing complaints or grievances.

This policy is guided by the Australian/New Zealand Standard (AS/NZS 10002:2014): *Guidelines for complaint management in organisations*.

### **DEFINITIONS**

For the purpose of this Policy the following terms are defined as follows:

a '**complainant**' is a parent, guardian or their representative making a complaint.

a **'complaint'** is an expression of dissatisfaction made to or about the School, related to its services, employees or the handling of a complaint, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required. For example:

*Samantha hasn't been placed in a room with her friends on school camp for the past two years. I appreciate room allocation can be a difficult task for the school but could you please keep this in mind when placing Samantha in a room on this year's camp.*

a complaint is considered to be 'resolved' when the Complainant and the School agree on an appropriate response or remedy

a complaint is considered to be 'finalised' when the School has made a final determination on the matter after exhausting the processes set out in this Policy

a complaint is considered to be 'unresolved' when agreement cannot be reached on a course of action and/or a remedy, or if the remedy cannot be implemented.

a **'dispute'** is when an unresolved complaint is escalated internally or externally, or both.

a **'parent'** includes:

- a person who has parental responsibility for 'major long term issues' as defined in the *Family Law Act 1975 (Cth)*
- a person appointed as 'guardian' pursuant to the *Children Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)*
- an informal carer with whom the child normally or regularly resides, and who has day-to-day care and control of the child

#### **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

- *Student Focused* - The School is open to feedback including complaints and will show a commitment to resolving complaints with the educational wellbeing of students as the first priority.
- *People Focused* - The School has a people focused and proactive approach to seeking and receiving feedback and complaints and demonstrates a strong commitment to addressing issues raised within a reasonable timeframe.  
Complainants will be treated with respect, and they will be actively involved in the complaints process as far as practicable and appropriate in the circumstances.
- *No Detriment to Complainant* - All reasonable steps will be taken to ensure that Complainants are not adversely affected because of a complaint made by them or on their behalf.
- *Visibility and Transparency* - The School will ensure that information about how and where a complaint may be made to or about the School is well publicised.
- *Accessibility* - The School will ensure the complaints process is accessible to everyone, particularly Complainants who might require assistance.  
The School will provide support to Complainants to make a complaint where necessary.  
Complainants may have a support person present with them when making a complaint as long as the School is notified in advance.
- *No Cost* - Complainants will not be charged a fee to complain.
- *Continual Improvement* - Complaint procedures will be regularly reviewed for improvement. Complaint data and feedback should be used to identify recurrent themes and to implement improvement measures where a need is identified.

#### **EXPECTATION OF COMPLAINANTS**

##### **General Expectations**

In making a complaint, the School requests and expects Complainants 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 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. **Under no circumstances should a Parent/Guardian approach another student at any time to discuss the issue or chastise him or her.** Direct contact with other Parents/Guardians to resolve the matter is also discouraged if the complaint pertains to issues or incidents that have arisen at the School.

### **Unreasonable Conduct by Complainants**

All complaints should be considered in accordance with this Policy, including when Complainant behaviour is thought to be unreasonable.

While the School considers a range of factors and views, it may at any point in the process outlined in this Policy consider a Complainant's behaviour to be unreasonable. In these circumstances, it is appropriate for the School to communicate the basis on which the conclusion was made to the Complainant in writing. The School may also indicate an acceptable procedure for future communication with the Complainant about their complaint.

A small number of complainants can act quite unreasonably in seeking to have their concerns addressed by the School. For example, they might be aggressive and verbally abusive towards School employees. They might threaten harm and violence, bombard the School with unnecessary and excessive phone calls and emails, make inappropriate demands on time and resources, and refuse to accept the School's decisions and recommendations in relation to their complaints. When complainants behave in these ways, the School may consider their conduct to be unreasonable.

Complainant conduct is likely to be unreasonable where it involves behaviour which, because of its nature or frequency, raises substantial health, safety, resource or equity issues for the School, its employees, other students, Parents/Guardians or the Complainants themselves.

This behaviour may be transient, and definitions of 'unreasonable' apply to the behaviour rather than the person. An individual may exhibit unreasonable behaviour on one or more occasions, but this does not mean they will be permanently deemed an 'unreasonable person'. Principles of fairness and equity still apply.

Such unreasonable conduct by Complainants does not preclude valid issues being addressed by the School.

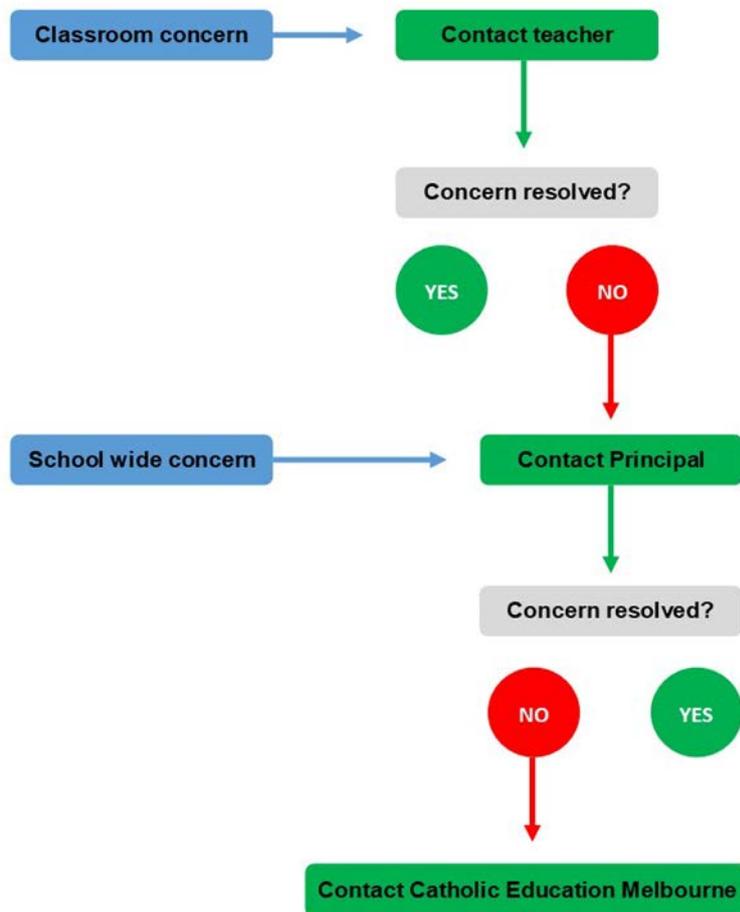
Examples of conduct that could either in isolation or taken together, constitute unreasonable Complainant conduct include the following:

- *unreasonable persistence.* For example, making excessive numbers/volumes of telephone calls, emails, letters, and supplying excessive volumes of paperwork, in support of their complaint (when requested not to), or refusing to accept the decision of the decision maker based solely on the fact it was not in the Complainant's favour.
- *unreasonable demands.* For example, demanding a different outcome without demonstrating that the original decision was wrong, making unreasonable demands generally (for example - requesting a child be moved to another class).
- *unreasonable lack of cooperation.* For example, failing or refusing to identify the issue of complaint (where the Complainant is capable of identifying the issue) or providing disorganised information (where the Complainant is capable of organising the information).
- *unreasonable arguments.* For example, expressing irrational claims/beliefs/conspiracy theories, making vexatious complaints, or illogically or unrealistically denying any responsibility for actions or inaction.
- *unreasonable behaviour.* For example, making threats of harm to self, complaint handlers or third parties, making baseless attacks on the intentions, motivations, ethics or conduct of complaint handlers, using abusive language that goes beyond what is reasonable to expect a complaint handler to put up with, expressing unreasonable anger, aggression or violence, or lying or being intentionally misleading.

## MAKING A COMPLAINT

Parents/Guardians should utilise the 'Parental Complaints Flowchart' below when making a complaint:  
Parents/Guardians should communicate with the School by telephoning, visiting and/or emailing:

### Parental Complaints Flowchart



Refer to the Catholic Education Melbourne [Complaints Policy](#)

1. The student's classroom teacher, in relation to learning issues and incidents that happened in their class. Parents/Guardians must not walk through the school to approach the teacher unannounced
2. The Deputy Principal, if students from several classes are involved
3. The Principal, about issues relating to school policy, school management, staff members or very complex student issues
4. If you are not sure who to contact, contact the school on (03) 9885 7704 or [office@srgleniris.catholic.edu.au](mailto:office@srgleniris.catholic.edu.au)
5. Concerns or complaints must not be raised through social media platforms. The School expects a person making a comment, raising a concern or complaint to:
  - Do so promptly, as soon as possible after the issue occurs
  - Provide complete and factual information about the concern or complaint, preferably in writing if it is a complex issue (*See example at Appendix 1*)
  - 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 each other's point of view and value difference, rather than judge and blame
  - Recognise that all parties have rights and responsibilities which must be balanced.

## **Students with a Disability**

Students with disabilities have rights under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)*, the *Disability Standards for Education 2005 (Cth)* and the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)* to access their education on the same basis as their peers, including the right to reasonable adjustments.

As with all complaints to which this Policy applies, Complainants should raise any concerns or complaints regarding the treatment of a student with a disability with the School in the first instance.

The School also recognises that parents of students with a disability can raise complaints or concerns regarding a student with a disability in a number of forums, including:

- the Australian Human Rights Commission – in relation to complaints regarding compliance with the *Disability Discrimination Act* or the Disability Standards for Education
- the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission – in relation to complaints regarding compliance with the *Equal Opportunity Act*
- Catholic Education Melbourne

## **MANAGING COMPLAINTS**

Best practice dictates that an effective complaint management system incorporates levels of complaint management.

The aim is to resolve the majority of complaints at the first level – the classroom teacher. At each level, either the Complainant or the School can decide to escalate the issue to a higher level. The level of escalation should be relative to the seriousness of the complaint and the nature of previous contact the Complainant has had with the School.

### **Frontline Complaint Handling – Early Resolution**

The majority of complaints will be addressed at this level by the classroom teacher where appropriate. This will allow minor complaints to be brought to an early resolution.

### **Internal Assessment, Investigation, Facilitated Resolution or Review**

Although the classroom teacher should be able to resolve many complaints, the seriousness of some complaints or a Complainant's dissatisfaction with how their matter has been dealt with may warrant the complaint being dealt with by the Deputy Principal or Principal. This level of complaint handling may provide the following:

- a) *Internal assessment.* The information provided by the Complainant will be assessed to determine whether, and if so how, the complaint can be dealt with by the School. Such an assessment may consider such issues as:
  - the nature and seriousness of the matters alleged
  - the Complainant's desired outcome
  - whether there is any utility in taking the matter further
  - the adequacy of the information provided
  - the options available to address the Complainant's concerns
  - the appropriate level at which the matters alleged or complained about can be addressed by the School
- b) *Internally facilitated resolution.* Where the Deputy Principal or Principal of the School talks with a Complainant (or an agreed independent mediator talks with representatives of both parties) to see if some form of mutually acceptable resolution can be achieved.
- c) *Internal investigation.* Investigating allegations that raise significant issues for either the School or Complainant. Depending on the circumstances, such investigations may be undertaken by the Deputy Principal, Principal, a delegate or an external investigator under contract.
- d) *Internal review.* The Parish Priest may review a decision of the Principal.

### **External Complaint Escalation**

When a Complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of an internal assessment, investigation, review or resolution process, referral to Catholic Education Melbourne may be appropriate. Dissatisfied Complainants will be referred to Catholic Education Melbourne in accordance with their [Complaints Policy](#). Complainants should contact the Catholic Education Melbourne, Eastern Region Office on (03) 9427 6400.

## **Responsiveness**

- The School will promptly acknowledge each complaint received. The School will assess complaints and give appropriate priority in accordance with the urgency of the issues raised.
- Complainants will be advised, as soon as practicable, where the School is unable to deal with either part or all of their complaint.
- The School will endeavour to deal with complaints effectively.
- The School will actively manage the expectations of Complainants through advising Complainants about:
  - the complaint process
  - the expected timeframes for its actions
  - their likely involvement in the process
  - the possible or likely outcome of their complaint, where practicable

## **Objectivity and Fairness**

Each complaint will be managed in an objective and unbiased manner.

Conflicting interests should not interfere with or be perceived to interfere with the management and resolution of complaints.

## **Equity**

All complaints should be addressed in an equitable manner and in accordance with this Policy, including when a Complainant's behaviour is thought to be unreasonable.

## **Privacy and Disclosure**

Personally identifiable information about any person should only be disclosed or used in compliance with all relevant privacy laws and ethical obligations when managing a complaint.

## **Communication**

- The School will actively communicate its progress to the Complainant, particularly where progress has been delayed.
- The School will communicate the outcome of the complaint to the Complainant in a manner which is mindful of the privacy of all parties, including other students.
- As far as possible, communication with the Complainant will focus on the actions of the School as a whole and how that may have affected the Complainant.
- If any adverse findings are made about a particular employee or student, the School will consider whether privacy obligations impact on what information could be given to the Complainant.

## **Anonymous Complaints**

The School will consider all complaints. However, it may not be able to fully consider a complaint if it cannot effectively liaise with the Complainant. Furthermore, anonymous complaints raise natural justice issues for respondents who have a right to know particulars of the allegations made against them.

## **EVALUATION**

This policy will be reviewed with staff, student, parent and community input as part of the school's three year review cycle.

## **Staff Members Involved:**

Simon Davies (Safeguarding Services), Richard Jacques, Angie Mastoras, Leadership Team and Staff

## **Date Of Ratification**

2014

## **Date of Review**

November 2017

August 2019

*All students attending St Roch's Parish Primary School have the right to feel safe.  
The care, safety and wellbeing of children and young people is a fundamental responsibility of all within our school.*

## Appendix 1

Dear Mrs Smith

As a Deputy Principal, I realise you have a tough and demanding job. I know that you are passionate about helping the students succeed at St Roch's. It is important that you know about a serious matter that is happening within the school.

My daughter, and two of her classmates, are being harassed during physical education class. One male student has been making derogatory comments to my daughter, and other girls in the class. This behavior has been happening for four days.

My daughter and I have both spoken with her classroom teacher, Miss Brooks about this matter. However, it has still continued. My letter to you is my next step in seeing that this student's behavior stops.

I would like to speak with you about this as soon as possible. Please contact me at [phone number].

Yours sincerely

Jane Doe