



## Complaints Handling Procedure

### Purpose of this Procedure

At St Joseph's School we are committed to providing a safe work environment for all employees and an educational setting that delivers educational outcomes for students whilst being welcoming for them and their families. We acknowledge, however, that parents, students and staff have a right to raise concerns and have them addressed by the appropriate member of staff. Complaints should be handled objectively and with sensitivity, and not in a reactive or subjective manner which may be discriminatory or constitute harassment.

The purpose of this document is to provide a procedure by which complaints can be addressed.

### St JOSEPH'S VISION & GRADUATE OUTCOME STATEMENT LINKS

Vision:

At St Joseph's we believe that:

- Every person is valued and respected, with individuality promoted and celebrated within a positive, enriching environment.

Graduate Outcomes:

- Are effective communicators and critical thinkers;

### Key beliefs that underpin our complaints handling procedure

The most desirable outcome in cases of complaints is:

1. The determination about whether there has been any unsatisfactory/inappropriate practice or action, as early as possible and in the fairest and most objective manner possible;
  - The implementation of any necessary changes designed to bring about better educational, pastoral or administrative outcomes, as appropriate;
  - The achievement of reconciliation between the parties;
  - The establishment of a renewed confidence in the educational, pastoral or administrative outcomes and practices at St Joseph's.
  - When in the professional judgement of the Principal or other Senior Staff members, there is a need for a complaint to be addressed or acted on, or it is in the best interests professionally or educationally, the parent, student (if appropriate) or staff member will be informed of the complaint.
  - In cases of alleged sexual or physical abuse of students where the Police and /or Children's Services are involved, the Principal shall follow the advice of these agencies in respect to the timing etc of raising the complaint with the parent, student (if appropriate) or staff member concerned.
  - The principal will follow the procedures outlined in the Sandhurst Diocesan Procedures for the Management of Allegations of Serious Misconduct Against Lay Employees in Catholic

## **Key elements of our complaints handling procedure**

The following are the key elements of our complaints handling procedure:

### **Impartiality**

If you make a complaint, the nominated person will investigate it in a fair and impartial manner. No judgements 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.

### **Confidentiality**

You can feel secure that if you do make a complaint under this policy, it will remain confidential. The only people who will have access to information about the complaint will be the person making the complaint, any witnesses to the alleged inappropriate behavior and the person investigating.

### **No victimization**

You can also rest assured that if you make a complaint you will not suffer in any way as a consequence. The School will ensure that a person who makes a complaint is not victimized in any way.

### **Timeliness**

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

## **What to do if you have a complaint**

### **1. Approach the person involved**

In the first instance, the parent, student (if appropriate) or staff member who has made the complaint is requested by the Principal or other senior staff member who receives the complaint, to discuss the concern with the teacher or other staff member concerned.

If the complaint relates to an allegation of serious misconduct of sexual physical or emotional abuse, the Principals will follow the procedures outlined in the Diocesan Procedures for the Management of Allegations of Misconduct Against Lay Employees in Catholic Schools and Catholic Education Offices.

### **2. Go to the Principal**

If, following redirection to the parent, student (if appropriate) or staff member concerned, the complainant does not feel the matter to be resolved, and further raises the concern with the Principal or other Senior staff member (as appropriate), the Principal will either:

(a) discuss the matter further with the complainant, and where the concern is based on misinformation, misunderstanding or is vexatious or misconceived, clarify the matter with the parent or student. In this instance, the parent, student (if appropriate) or staff member concerned should be informed that the complainant further discussed the matter with the Principal or Senior Staff member (as appropriate), and the outcome of the Principal's discussion with the parent, student (if appropriate) or staff member.

(a) discuss the matter further with the complainant, and where the Principal (or other senior staff member, as appropriate) forms the view that the concern is not vexatious nor misconceived, nor based on misinformation/ misunderstanding, will discuss the concern with the teacher or other staff member concerned.

(a) If the complaint is about the Principal and the complainant feels they can not approach the

Principal then the complaint is directed to the Canonical Administrator. The Canonical Administrator deals with the complaint or an appropriate person at the CEO in Bendigo such as the Educational Consultant.

### **What happens next?**

Once you have made the complaint, the Principal will then consider whether there are any reasons why he/she should not proceed to deal with the complaint. For example, the person you complained about may be a personal friend. If there is such a reason, which indicates it is inappropriate for the Principal to deal with your complaint, it will, with your consent, be referred to another appropriate person such as the Canonical Administrator or appropriate person at the CEO in Bendigo such as the Educational Consultant.

All complaints proceeded with by the Principal, will at the Principals discretion be formalized by being requested in writing.

If it is clear to proceed the Principal will then interview you. During this interview a number of things will be explained to you, such as what will happen if the complaint is found to be supported by the evidence, or if it is found to be not supported by the evidence. You will also be told where you can go for assistance if you are not happy with the way the School is dealing with the complaint. The Principal will then take a written record of the complaint.

The Principal will then talk to the person about whom the complaint is made to hear that side of the story. Any witnesses will also be interviewed. These interviews will be conducted separately and impartially. A written record will be kept of these interviews. The importance of confidentiality will be stressed to all parties and they will be warned of the consequences if there is a breach of confidentiality (e.g. possible defamation action, initiation of a complaint for harassment).

The Principal will then tell you what the other people said and discuss what should be done to sort out the problem. You should tell the Principal what action you would like taken, e.g. a written apology from the person, a written warning, etc.

### **Review**

If the complaint remains unresolved, it will be reviewed by the Director of Catholic Education Sandhurst or his / her appointee, who will make a final decision as to the outcome of the complaint.

### **Possible outcomes**

If the complaint is proved, the following are possible outcomes:  
appropriate action to rectify the issue  
a written apology;  
an official warning;  
counseling;  
disciplinary action; or  
dismissal.

If the complaint is unproved (not enough evidence), possible outcomes are:  
relevant training for parents, students (if appropriate) or staff  
monitoring of behavior of parents, students (if appropriate) or staff

If the complaint is proved not to have happened at all, the following are possible outcomes:  
counseling for the person who made the complaint;  
a written apology;  
an official warning;  
disciplinary action; or

dismissal.

The Principal will make sure that whatever outcome is decided upon actually happens. He/she will also assess the effectiveness of the outcome from time to time.

### **Appeals**

If you feel that the complaints procedure has not been followed properly, or that the outcome is unacceptable to you, you may appeal to the Director of Catholic Education, Sandhurst or his / her appointee.

The Director or his / her appointee will look at the way the complaint was handled and examine the outcome. If he / she believes it was handled properly and that the outcome was appropriate he / she will take no further action. If he / she thinks that the complaint was not handled properly, or that the outcome was inappropriate, he / she will organise for the complaint to be looked at again.

The person dealing with the appeal will be different than the person who first handled the complaint.

### **Go to an external agency**

If you are not happy with the way your complaint has been dealt with by the School, you may wish to go to an external agency for further advice and assistance. You may take your complaint to an external agency at any stage in the procedure if you are unhappy with progress in dealing with your complaint.

Created: 2015

Review Date: 2020

Next Review: 2024

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Complaint Information**

Introductory remarks from the Principal

| Status of information from the complainant

| Issues of confidentiality [confidentiality will not be maintained if there is a possibility of harm involved]

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Other parties involved: [names]

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Dates and times of events:

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What happened:

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Action already taken by complainant:

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What the complainant wants as a result of this meeting:

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Possible actions:

- | Record a formal complaint form.
- | All parties to meet with an internal or external facilitator.
- | The complainant discusses some strategies with the principal.
- | The complainant wants information about grievance procedures in the school and the school process for managing any complaints.
- | The complainant would like to access outside support e.g. Centacare.

Action taken:

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Recommendation from the Principal:

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Follow up required / no further action at this stage:

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Signatures:

Principal \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Complainant \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_