



St James' Parish School Complaints and Grievances Policy

Rationale

St James' School is committed to providing a safe and supportive learning environment. From time to time, students and parents can sometimes feel aggrieved about something that is happening at the school that they believe requires attention, further investigation or change in procedures or a resolution.

Policy Statement

St James' School is committed to implementing processes in which complaints are managed and resolved fairly and timely.

Principles

- The complaints resolution procedure is implemented for resolving complaints in relation to issues that fall within the school's area of responsibility.
- All cases of serious professional misconduct: sexual offences, criminal charges, or other serious incidents must be referred to the relevant regulator or authority.
- The principal has a responsibility to address unacceptable conduct or concerns that are observed or brought to the school's attention.
- Procedures for handling complaints will ensure there is procedural fairness throughout the process.
- It is important that all complaints, ensuing procedures and outcomes are fully documented and confidentiality is maintained.
- The principal may choose to respond to a complaint through an informal process in cases where the complaint is minor, the complainant wishes the matter to be dealt with informally or the complaint has arisen from lack of or unclear communication.
- Formal processes will be used when informal processes have not been successful, a complainant seeks a formal process, or the principal believes the complaint warrants formal investigation.
- This policy will be made available on the school's website and listed in the Parent Handbook.

Complaints and Grievances Procedure

In the first instance, complainants should contact the person/s involved in the issue when it first arises so that it can be resolved quickly. In many cases this would involve the classroom teacher in the resolution of the complaint even if the complaint was not directly about them. The types of complaints could include:

- issues related to student behaviour management procedures
- issues related to learning and teaching or student wellbeing
- damage/loss of personal property
- student wellbeing such as bullying or harassment

Concerns about your child could be addressed by:

1. writing a note to the relevant teacher outlining your concerns and providing a contact number for the teacher to contact you for further information or follow up. This contact will usually be outside of classroom times.
2. making an appointment to speak on the phone or in person with the teacher, ensuring that you inform the school about the issue you wish to discuss. Contacting the administration office can facilitate this. It is important to remember that teachers cannot always meet with you just before and after class times due to other responsibilities and meetings.

The teacher, together with any others who may be involved such as the child's classroom teacher, should be given a reasonable amount of time to take the steps required to resolve or address your concerns. Remember, it may not always be possible to resolve an issue to your complete satisfaction.

If the matter is urgent and the teacher is not available, then contact the administration office to arrange for a member of the leadership team or other suitable staff member to either meet or contact you.

Raising Concerns with Principal

Most concerns are resolved by discussing the issue with the relevant person. However, if the issue remains unresolved you can then ask to see the principal.

To do this, you will need to request an appointment through the administration office. Please note that:

- the principal may ask another senior staff member to speak with you on their behalf
- if a teacher is going to be present at the meeting, it is more likely to occur outside of classroom hours

If your concern is related to issues of school policy, these should be raised more formally (in writing) with the principal.

Maintaining a Safe Environment

At any stage in the complaint process, staff have the right to feel safe. Aggressive or abusive behaviour will not be tolerated. In such instances, the staff member will end the meeting and refer the matter to the principal and the school's occupational health and safety officer.

If the complainant feels unsafe, they should end the meeting and refer the matter to the principal. In the case of it being the principal, then the complainant should contact the governing authority.

Raising Concerns with Governing Authority or Catholic Education Office

Complaints are to be raised in the first instance with the school unless it is a serious issue regarding the principal. The school processes need to be followed.

If the complainant after meeting with the principal believes that the school has not listened to their concerns or followed school processes then the complainant can take the issue to the school governing authority or Catholic Education Office (CEO) Ballarat. It is important to note that the school will make decisions that are not always accepted by all the school community.

If a complainant believes that they have not been treated fairly or the result was not satisfactory, depending on the issue, the complainant can contact other agencies such as Worksafe.

The Department of Education and Training Victoria (DET) and the other Catholic education offices such as Catholic Education Melbourne do not investigate parent concerns related to schools in the Diocese of Ballarat.

It is an expectation that the complaint is respectful and reasonable and that the complainant cooperates with any process that is put in place. The governing authority or the CEO Ballarat may terminate any investigation or consideration of the matter if the complainant becomes unreasonable, aggressive or obstructs the process.

Confidentiality

The person who is dealing with your complaint will advise you if confidentiality applies to your complaint. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. If your complaint is about another person, they have a right to know that the complaint has been made about them and be given a chance to respond.

Making, Receiving and Investigating Complaints

At St James' School, all staff are expected to:

- listen carefully and deal calmly and respectfully with complaints
- document the complaint, actions taken and outcomes
- look at all sides of an issue
- focus particularly on issues that may be affecting the learning and/or safety of students
- resolve complaints in a timely manner
- provide feedback to the complainant on any actions/outcomes/decisions taken
- accept that it is not possible to resolve all complaints
- identify when a complaint cannot be resolved
- ensure privacy and confidentiality of information is maintained in accordance with relevant legislation
- refer more complex or unresolved complaints to the principal or the school governing authority

Those making complaints are expected to:

- be clear about the topic or issue to be discussed
- focus on the things that are genuinely affecting your child
- always remain calm and respectful, particularly when discussing the complaint in the presence of children
- remember you may not have all the facts relating to the circumstances of the topic or issue you wish to discuss
- think about what would be an acceptable outcome for you and your child that is consistent with school policy and procedures
- listen carefully to other sides of the issue
- be informed by checking the school's policies or guidelines, where relevant
- understand that follow up consequences or actions for others cannot be disclosed
- accept that it is not possible to resolve all complaints
- be aware that you have the right to seek advocacy, mediation, counselling or support. This should be discussed with the school.

Record Keeping

A record of a complaint should include the following detail:

- Date when issue was first raised
- Name of parent(s)
- Name of student(s)
- Detailed statement of concern/complaint including:
 - nature of complaint
 - identity of person(s) involved
 - time of allegation
 - description of the procedures applied and the time frame for reporting on the outcomes of any investigation
 - statement of outcomes

staff member(s) handing complaint

The record of complaint will be filed in school records management system.

References : Appendix 1, Appendix 2, Appendix 3 & Appendix 4

Policy Updated: 2018, 2020
Policy Review: 2023

APPENDIX 1

GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES FOR FAMILIES

The relationship between the home and the school is a very important part of ensuring that children are happy, secure and open to learning. Parents and teachers need to work closely together to provide the best educational opportunities for children. We encourage you to discuss your child's progress with his/her teacher and to let the teacher know if you have any concerns so the school can work with you to resolve these as promptly and effectively as possible.

What to do if you have a problem:

- Try to identify the problem clearly before contacting the school. If there is more than one problem, list them to ensure that the extent of the problem is clear to the school.
- Decide whether the problem is a concern, enquiry or complaint. This will help in finding a solution.
- Make an appointment to meet with your child's class teacher. The best way to do this is to contact the school office to arrange a mutually convenient time for a telephone call or meeting.
- If you do not feel after your meeting that the matter has been resolved or if you have a complaint about the teacher or another staff member, make arrangements to meet with the Assistance Principal.
- Try to stay calm when discussing your concern. Even if you don't feel it, being calm will help you get your concerns across more clearly than if you are upset or angry. It may help to take someone with you.
- Remember, the staff are committed to resolving any issues that parents might have regarding their children and will discuss with you actions that might be taken in regard to your concern.
- If you still do not feel that the matter has been resolved or if your complaint is about a very serious matter, send your complaint in writing to the Principal.
- After your complaint has been dealt with by the School Principal, if you are still not satisfied with the outcome, you should then send your complaint in writing to the Education Consultant for your school.
- If the matter has still not been resolved, notify the Director of Catholic Education stating your concerns in writing. If no resolution has been achieved, the Director will arbitrate after thorough examination of the grievance and related issues.
- If matters still remain unresolved you have the right to seek arbitration through the courts, ombudsman, legal representation and other government commissions such as Human Rights Commission etc. These might entail some financial cost to you.

Note: The School Registration Board and the Secretary of the Department of Education **do not** deal with complaints within the Catholic Education system except in so far as those complaints relate to Standards required by the Victorian Schools Registration Board.

When you make a complaint:

- If a complaint is made against a person, that person will be informed of the nature and content of the complaint and will have the right to respond.
- Discussions of complaints are confidential.
- Complaints may be made verbally or in writing.
- All complaints, the actions taken to resolve them and outcomes of those actions will be fully documented.

- A person who has made a complaint may withdraw it at any time. If the complaint is in writing, the withdrawal should also be in writing.

- No one will be victimised as a result of taking out a formal grievance.
- At the formal stage, a person who has made a complaint has the right to be represented and supported by another person eg. a friend or other person of his/her choice as a support person.
- A process of mediation is an option at any stage of the process.

APPENDIX 2

INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

It is important that everyone feels happy and safe at school so that the best learning can take place. Everyone, staff and students, need to work closely together to provide the best educational opportunities for you. If you have a problem, a concern or a complaint, we encourage you to speak to someone about it.

What to do if you have a problem:

- Try to identify the problem that is upsetting you. If there is more than one problem, list them so that you are clear about what you feel or need.
- If you feel you can, talk to the person you are having the problem with and if their behaviour is upsetting you, tell them to stop.
- If you do not feel that you could do this or if your talk with the person does not solve your problem, talk to a teacher about your concerns and ask them to help you deal with it. Your teacher will often be able to give you good ideas on how to cope with it and will help you. You should explain:
 - Who was involved
 - What happened
 - What you did
 - What you believe was unfair or unjust
- Try to stay calm when discussing your problem. Even if you don't feel it, being calm will help you get your concerns across more clearly than if you are upset or angry. It may help to take someone with you.
- Work with the teacher to decide what should be done to help you.
- If you still do not feel that the matter has been solved, make an appointment to talk to the person at the school who deals with student problems. The teacher will tell you who this is if you don't already know.
- If you still do not feel that the matter has been solved, make a time to talk to the Principal about your concern.

Remember:

- Sometimes the person helping you will need to speak to someone else so that the problem can be solved. You need to let that person know that you are comfortable with that.
- You can bring a friend, parent or a teacher to support you when you need to talk about the problem.
- No one will be allowed to pick on you or hurt you because you are making a complaint.
- If you want to, you can write out your complaint in a letter instead of talking about it, but the person helping you will need to speak to you later.
- A process of mediation is an option at any stage of the process.

APPENDIX 3

INFORMATION FOR STAFF

As an employee of St James' Parish School we believe that the relationship between colleagues is a very important part of our working environment. We recognise that all staff need to work closely together to provide the best educational opportunities for students. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding any other member of the ST JAMES' PARISH SCHOOL education community, we strongly encourage you to work together to resolve these as promptly and effectively as you can.

What to do if you have a problem:

- Try to identify the problem clearly before taking any action. If there is more than one problem, list them to ensure that the extent of the problem is clear.
- Decide whether the problem is a concern, enquiry or complaint. This will help in finding a solution.
- In the interests of resolving matters quickly and effectively, you are encouraged to informally discuss your concern/complaint with the person concerned.
- You may also wish to informally discuss your concerns with a senior staff member and seek advice and assistance.
- If informal strategies do not resolve the issue, make your complaint formally and in writing to the Principal. Where the Principal advises, mediation can be arranged between the parties concerned, with their mutual agreement.
- If you still do not feel that the matter has been resolved, if your complaint is serious or involves the Principal, telephone or send your complaint in writing to the Education Consultant for your school who will then contact you and make arrangements for you to discuss your grievance.
- If the matter has still not been resolved, notify the Director of Catholic Education stating your concerns in writing. If no resolution has been achieved, the Director will arbitrate after thorough examination of the grievance and related issues.
- If the matter still remains unresolved you have the right to seek arbitration through the courts, ombudsman, legal representation and other government commissions such as Workplace Safety, Anti-Discrimination and Human Rights Commissions. These might entail some financial cost to you.

When you decide to make a complaint:

- If a complaint is made against a person, that person will be informed of the nature and content of the complaint and will have the right to respond.
- Discussions of complaints are confidential.
- Complaints may be made verbally or in writing.
- All complaints, the actions taken to resolve them and outcomes of those actions will be fully documented.
- A person who has made a complaint may withdraw it at any time. If the complaint is in writing, the withdrawal should also be in writing.
- No one will be victimized as a result of taking out a formal grievance.
- At the formal stage, a person who has made a complaint has the right to be represented and supported by another person eg. his/her union, work colleague, friend or other person of his/her choice as a support person.



Parent–School Relationships Code of Conduct

Introduction

At St James' Parish School we are committed to nurturing respectful relationships and active partnerships with you as parents. We believe that our students' learning journeys are enriched through positive and reciprocal home and school relationships.

As parents, you act as one of the most influential role models in your child's life. We therefore seek your support in promoting and upholding the core values of the school community and its culture of respectful relationships.

This Code of Conduct is intended to guide you in your dealings with staff, other parents, students and the wider school community. It articulates the school's key expectations of both staff and parents with regard to respectful relationships and behaviours. It also specifies the school's position with regard to unacceptable behaviours that breach our culture of respect.

This Code of Conduct is to be read in conjunction with the school's:

- St James' Parish School Safeguarding Children Code of Conduct
- St James' Parish School Complaints and Grievances Policy & Procedures

Our Culture of Respectful Relationships

Among students, staff and parents we strive to develop the following:

- a respect for the innate dignity and worth of every person
- an ability to understand the situation of others
- a cooperative attitude in working with others
- open, positive and honest communication
- the ability to work respectfully with other people • trusting relationships
- responsible actions.

In promoting and upholding this culture, we expect that parents will:

- support the school's Catholic ethos, traditions and practices
- support the school in its efforts to maintain a positive teaching and learning environment
- understand the importance of healthy parent/teacher/child relationships and strive to build the relationships
- adhere to the school's policies, as outlined on the school website • treat staff and other parents with respect and courtesy.

In promoting and upholding this culture, we expect that staff will:

- communicate with you regularly regarding your child's learning, development and wellbeing
- provide opportunities for involvement in your child's learning
- maintain confidentiality over sensitive issues

- relate with and respond to you in a respectful and professional manner
- ensure a timely response to any concerns raised by you.

Raising Concerns and Resolving Conflict **(Refer also to our Complaints Policy)**

In raising concerns on behalf of your child, or making a complaint about the school's practices or treatment of your child, **we expect that you will:**

- listen to your child, but remember that a different 'reality' may exist elsewhere;
- observe the school's stated procedures for raising and resolving a grievance/complaint;
- follow specified protocol for communication with staff members, including making appointments at a mutually convenient time and communicating your concerns in a constructive manner;
- refrain from approaching another child while in the care of the school to discuss or chastise them because of actions towards your child. Refer the matter directly to your child's teacher for follow-up and investigation by the school.

In responding to your concerns or a complaint, **we expect that staff will:**

- observe confidentiality and a respect for sensitive issues
- ensure your views and opinions are heard and understood
- communicate and respond in ways that are constructive, fair and respectful
- ensure a timely response to your concerns/complaint
- strive for resolutions and outcomes that are satisfactory to all parties.

Staff Safety and Wellbeing

The school places high value and priority on maintaining a safe and respectful working environment for our staff. We regard certain behaviours as harmful and unacceptable insofar as they compromise the safety and professional wellbeing of our staff. These behaviours include, but are not limited to:

- shouting or swearing, either in person or on the telephone
- physical or verbal intimidation
- aggressive hand gestures
- writing rude, defamatory, aggressive or abusive comments to/about a staff member (emails/social media)
- racist or sexist comments
- damage or violation of possessions/property.

When a parent behaves in such unacceptable ways, the principal or a senior staff member will seek to resolve the situation and repair relationships through discussion and/or mediation.

Where a parent's behaviour is deemed likely to cause ongoing harm, distress or danger to the staff member and others, we may exercise our legal right to impose a temporary or permanent ban from the parent entering the school premises. In an extreme act of violence that causes physical harm to the staff member and his/her property, the matter may be reported to the police for investigation.