



# St. Leonard's Catholic Primary School

*Aspiring to Excellence*

## St Leonard's Primary School

### COMPLAINTS MANAGEMENT POLICY

Complaints are best addressed by students, parents, teachers, principals, parish priests and support staff working in partnership.

#### **Our Catholic School's Beliefs and Values**

At St. Leonard's we strive to be a community of faith, hope and love where communication takes place in an environment of transparency, respect, compassion, tolerance and inclusion in the interests of all students.

Within the reality of the schooling experience, it is recognised that from time to time misunderstandings and differences will occur, and that these need to be resolved satisfactorily in partnership with members of our school community. Addressing such matters within a framework of dignity, respect and truth can provide powerful opportunities to model the love of Christ in the reality of our contemporary world.

#### **St. Leonard's Vision and Mission**

##### **VISION**

Aspiring to Excellence.

##### **MISSION**

In the spirit and tradition of Catholic Education, we aim to provide a safe and caring Gospel based Christian educational environment for the children of St. Leonard's Parish.

The school's approach to handling concerns and complaints is based on our vision and our values of:

- providing a safe and supportive learning environment
- building relationships between students, parents and staff
- providing a safe working environment for staff
- using Restorative Practices when appropriate

#### **Definition and Scope**

A grievance or complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived situation or outcome of an action taken, decision made, service provided or handling of an issue at St Leonard's School, where a response or resolution is expected.

The dissatisfaction may be based on a perception that the school has:

- done something wrong
- failed to do something it should have
- acted unfairly or inappropriately.

It may be about the school, an individual staff member, a student or about a policy or procedure.

Examples may include:

- issues related to student discipline procedures
- issues related to learning and teaching
- damage/loss of personal property
- bullying and harassment.

This guidance focuses on grievances and complaints raised by parents, guardians, carers and students (complainant). It does not cover complaints:

- that are of a child protection nature which must be addressed in accordance with child protection laws and reporting obligations.
- from staff about aspects of their work or employment conditions. It is appropriate that schools handle these matters in accordance with the relevant Enterprise Agreement.

### **Child Protection Procedures**

Nothing in this document replaces our school's obligations to comply with the legal requirements and procedures that relate to mandatory reporting and managing the risk of child abuse under the

Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic.), the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic.), the Child Wellbeing and

Safety Act 2005 (Vic.) and Ministerial Order No. 870 - Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools made under the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic.). Schools must abide by the professional, moral and legal obligations to implement child protection and child safety policies, protocols and practices within their school.

### **Ownership and Scope**

The Principal and school will develop its policy to address complaints in collaboration with staff. These procedures take effect from 2019

### **Expectations for all Parties**

St. Leonard's expects a person raising a complaint to:

- do so promptly, as soon as possible after the issue occurs
- provide complete and factual information about the concern or complaint

- 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

St. Leonard's will address complaints received from parents:

- confidentially
- courteously
- efficiently
- fairly
- promptly, or within the timeline agreed with the person with the complaint
- in accordance with due process, principles of natural justice and the Catholic Education Office's policies.

### **Natural Justice and Procedural Fairness**

The principles of natural justice and procedural fairness apply to all complaints and requires that:

- the rights of both sides to be heard and treated fairly
- the equal treatment of all parties to the dispute
- adequate communication and notice to be given to the parties outlining the process
- the person about whom the complaint is made is informed of the content of the complaint and, in most cases of the identity of the complainant at a point in time when it is clear what the issues are and who needs to respond to them
- the person about whom the complaint is made is given the opportunity to respond to any allegations
- investigations are conducted impartially, facts of the case substantiated, and decisions are made without bias
- The school reserves the right to speak with any student of adult implicated in the complaint

### **Confidentiality**

St Leonard's will treat your complaint with respect and sensitivity. However, it may not be possible that all communications with us, or any documents you may supply to us, will necessarily be kept confidential. Although we endeavour to deal with complaints with appropriate discretion, we

reserve our right to disclose details of the matter to other persons who in our opinion need to know them, to facilitate the resolution of the complaint.

## **Raising Complaints**

In the first instance, a complaint should be made to the school with a face-to-face meeting.

Students are encouraged to raise complaints with their classroom teacher in the context of everyday interactions. When a complaint is not addressed adequately face to face, the parents should telephone, visit or write to:

- the student's teacher, who will then address this issue but may communicate to the wellbeing leader deputy principal or principal.

Generally:

- the classroom teacher will handle issues about learning and incidents that happened in their class or group
- the student wellbeing leader or deputy principal will become involved if issues are more complex or students from several classes are involved
- the deputy principal will address issues relating to staff members or complex student issues
- the principal will address issues relating to school policy, school management, staff members or very complex student issues
- the parish priest will address issues relating to parish policies and practices

The use of social media platforms to voice complaints is not recommended. In our experience this can undermine our school values of respectful communication and building community.

Parents may be required to complete a Complaints Form (Appendix 1.)

For contact details for any staff member, parents are asked to call the office.

If you are not sure who to contact, contact the deputy principal.

## **Help with Raising Complaints**

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.

A complainant who wishes to use these support services should ensure the person addressing the concern or complaint is aware of their intention and is in agreement, prior to any meetings or telephone conversations.

## **Managing Parent Concerns and Complaints Information**

All complaints received will be recorded by the staff members involved.

- name and contact details of the person with a complaint
- the date the concern was expressed, or the complaint made
- the form in which the concern or complaint was received (such as face-to-face, by telephone, in writing, by email)
- a brief description of the complaint
- details of the school officer responding to the complaint
- action taken on the complaint
- the outcome of action taken on the complaint
- any recommendations for future improvement in the school's policy or procedures.

However, in the first instance, when the complaint is easily resolved in a telephone call, a brief note in the school's/principal's/teacher's diary or computer recording the issue and the resolution may be all that is required.

Where appropriate, complaints may also be recorded in the school's student reporting database.

### **Addressing Complaints**

St Leonard's will make every effort to resolve complaints.

A copy of the complaints procedures is on the school website.

All complaints will be noted and acted on promptly by the staff member who receives the complaint.

St Leonard's will acknowledge all complaints made. It will provide the complainant with a timeline for investigating the complaint. (Appendix 3 Sample Acknowledgement Letter to Complainant)

The assistant principal or principal will investigate complaints that cannot be resolved by the classroom teacher and will provide a response to the complainant.

Complaints about general school matters (such as the timing of events, school policies and facilities) will be addressed by the principal or a relevant staff member.

The school will make every attempt to resolve a complaint as quickly as possible. If the complaint involves many students and a range of issues, the school will need more time to investigate it. If the complaint is about an issue which occurred some time ago, involves the recounts of young or multiple students with differing versions, the school may need more time to investigate it or not be able to resolve it.

Should the complaint involve complex issues, an initial face to face discussion is preferred. If a complex issue, the school might need to take advice from our parish priest and/or the Catholic Education Office. St Leonard's will discuss with the complainant the new timeline for addressing

the complaint and the reasons for any delays. In all cases, the school will try but not guarantee to resolve a complaint.

### **Anonymous Complaints**

St Leonard's endeavours to address and respond to all complaints. In some situations, it may not be able to fully address complaints that are made anonymously or without sufficient detail being provided to enable an investigation or resolution of the matter.

### **Withdrawal of a Complaint**

A complaint can be withdrawn at any stage during the complaint management process. A complaint should be retracted in writing by the complainant and addressed to the principal.

### **Resolution**

If a complaint is substantiated in whole or part, all parties will offer an appropriate resolution. For example, at its discretion and depending on the circumstances, the school might offer:

- an explanation or further information about the issue
- mediation, counselling or other support
- a verbal or written apology, expression of regret or admission of fault
- to uphold the complaint and change its decision
- to change its policies, procedures or practices
- confidential staff development or performance improvement

Privacy laws may prohibit information being provided to the complainant of any specific action that has been taken in relation to individuals about whom the complaint has been raised.

The school will implement the resolution as soon as practicable.

The agreed plan will be monitored.

### **Complaint dismissed**

A complaint can only be dismissed:

- after it has been investigated
- if an investigation has determined that the complaint cannot be substantiated

### **Complaint unresolved**

A complaint is considered to be unresolved if the complainant does not agree on a course of action and/or a remedy, or if the remedy cannot be implemented.

It may not always be possible to fully resolve all complaints to the complainant's satisfaction. This could happen if the complainant has unrealistic expectations about the outcome of their complaint,

or if the school, Catholic Education Office or Church's policies or regulations are contrary to their views.

## **Referral of Complaints**

If a person with a complaint is not satisfied with the outcome determined by the school, they should contact the parish priest.

If the matter cannot be resolved at the school level, or if the complaint is about the principal of the school, complainants may contact the relevant Catholic Education Office Eastern Regional Office and the complaint will be handled in accordance with the respective Catholic Education Offices complaints policies.

(See Appendix 3: Complaint Flowchart)

## **Communication and Training**

St Leonard's' procedures for addressing complaints is published on the school's website.

St Leonard's will:

- brief all members of staff (including volunteers) about its procedures to address complaints annually
- provide staff with (or provide access to) training and support appropriate to their responsibilities under the procedures

## **Monitoring the Complaints Management Policy**

St Leonard's will monitor parent complaints and consider issues raised through the parent complaints process, and any other relevant information from the parent opinion survey, when undertaking a review of the school's policies, procedures and operations.

The school will review its information about complaints made over time to:

- identify common or recurring issues that may need addressing
- assess the effectiveness of these and other procedures and whether they are being followed
- use information provided to the school through the parent opinion survey on the views of parents.

This policy should be read in conjunction with our Parent-School Relationships Code of Conduct.

This policy is adapted from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's 'Addressing Parents' Concerns and Complaints Effectively: Policy and Guides,' Melbourne, 2009 with reference to Catholic Schools Organisational Guide

Office for Government School Education

Complaints Management: Practical Guide for Schools CECV 2017

Appendix 1: Complaint Form

Appendix 2: Sample Acknowledgement Letter to Complainant

Appendix 3: Catholic Education Melbourne Complaint Flowchart

## **Evaluation**

This policy was updated on 5-8-2019

It will be reviewed again in 2021



**Appendix 1: Complaint Form**

<b>1. YOUR DETAILS</b>	
Family Name	Given Name(s)
Address	
Contact Number	
Email or Fax	
<b>2. YOU ARE:</b> (Please tick)	<b>3. THE COMPLAINT IS ABOUT:</b>
Student <input type="checkbox"/>	A school <input type="checkbox"/> Name of School
Parent/Carer <input type="checkbox"/>	Catholic Education Office <input type="checkbox"/> Specify location
Staff <input type="checkbox"/>	Policy/Procedure <input type="checkbox"/> Name of Policy
	Other (please specify) <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>4 DETAILS OF THE COMPLAINT</b>	
(Please attach additional page if space is insufficient)	
<b>5 DETAILS OF THE OUTCOME YOU ARE SEEKING</b>	
(Please attach additional page if space is insufficient)	
<b>6. HAVE YOU PREVIOUSLY RAISED THIS CONCERN WITH A STAFF MEMBER?</b> (PLEASE TICK)	
No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when?	
Who dealt with the matter?	
What was the result?	
Signature:	Date:

## Appendix 2: Sample Acknowledgement Letter or Email to Complainant

Date

Dear [NAME]

I refer to information provided by you/your son/your daughter, [child's name], to [name], [position], regarding the attached complaint.

The matter has been referred to me and I propose to deal with it by (state the process).

You will be contacted at various stages of the process regarding progress of the complaint. If you require any information, please contact me by telephone at St Leonard's.

Yours sincerely

Name

## Appendix 3: Complaint Flowchart

### Catholic Education Melbourne Complaint Flowchart

