



Our Lady of Mount Carmel School

Complaints and Grievances Policy

INTRODUCTION

At Our Lady of Mount Carmel School we are committed to building a school culture that features positive and respectful relationships. As a Catholic school, these relationships are grounded in the values of the Gospels, 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 students and parents can sometimes feel aggrieved about something that is happening at the school. Every member of our school community has the right to have their grievance or complaint addressed, and we will work positively and resolutely to address a satisfactory outcome for all people involved.

Occasionally, there is a need for parents to raise concerns about practice or policy in schools. These concerns are generally addressed to all parties' satisfaction at the local level through informal means. Where this is not the case and a more formal structure is required, then the following procedures will be followed. In either case, these procedures aim to expeditiously resolve the complaint, while ensuring the parents, students and staff are not victimised and that the rights of teachers are not prejudiced. The objective of this policy is to resolve complaints as quickly and fairly as possible.

This policy outlines our principles and procedures for receiving and resolving complaints. It ought to be read in conjunction with related policies and core documents of the school, namely:

- Harassment and Discrimination Policy
- School Vision
- Child Safety Policy

Implementation

If parents wish to contact a member of staff to discuss any matters relating to their child's progress or situation at school, the best procedure is to contact the teacher involved, giving a brief outline of the purpose of the contact or meeting.

Contact should be made using one of the following approaches:

1. Parents may contact the school, either by phone or by coming to the office personally, and make arrangements for the teacher to make contact to organise a suitable meeting time. Teachers are not normally available to come to the phone or office during teaching time.

2. Contact the appropriate teacher in writing asking them to set up a suitable meeting time.

3. Approach the appropriate teacher at a time when they are not teaching or on duty to arrange a suitable time to meet. Note that most teaching staff are engaged in scheduled meetings immediately following school on both Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

If parents have a concern or wish to discuss an issue about a child, situation or procedure within a particular level of the school, the best procedure is to approach the relevant teacher using one of the three approaches outlined above. If parents have a concern or wish to discuss an issue about a situation that they consider affects the whole school or relates to a school policy or procedure the best procedure is to approach the Principal or the Deputy Principal using one of the three approaches outlined above.

If parents have a concern or wish to discuss an issue relating to a member of staff or of another sensitive nature, they should make direct contact with the Principal using one of the approaches above. In all cases, if the matter is urgent and/or relates to the possible risk of harm to a child, member of staff or member of the community, the Principal should be informed immediately and the urgency of the matter conveyed. The Principal will determine who is the most appropriate person to deal with the issue and will ensure that contact is made as soon as possible.

To Summarise: In most cases the steps to be taken are as follows:

1. Contact the class teacher, if the matter is not resolved or is not appropriate for the teacher to address:

2. Contact the Principal or Deputy Principal.

Key elements of the complaints handling procedure:

Complaints about school matters should be made to the Principal. Upon receipt of a written complaint or a transcribed oral one, the principal or other appropriate person is to:

1. Discuss the issue with the person who is the subject of the complaint
2. Provide a copy of the written complaint to the persons concerned (if appropriate)
3. Clarify the issues of complaint and allow a right of reply
4. Investigate and discuss options for resolution with all parties

5. Decide on the option deemed to be most appropriate
6. Implement a decision and provide feedback to all concerned

In receiving and responding to complaints, the following guiding principles will direct and shape the school's actions:

- We will work with the complaint with respect, courtesy and openness and with a genuine desire to achieve fair and reasonable decisions.
- The complaint will be resolved as quickly as possible.
- Confidentiality, impartiality and the principles of natural justice will form the basis of our complaints resolution process.
- The person(s) facing the complaint will be provided with detailed information about the substance of the complaint and will have the opportunity to respond.
- Personal information disclosed will be treated as confidential.
- Our resolution process will be grounded in sound and fair procedures for information sharing, conciliation, investigation and decision making.
- If a satisfactory outcome cannot be achieved, the school will provide the complainant with options for having the decision reviewed or mediated via an external authority.
- The communal needs of the school community will in most instances exceed the needs of any individual.
- If necessary, enable a complainant to be accompanied by another person of his/her choice as a support person.
- Enable the person against whom the complaint has been made to be respond, and to be accompanied to any meeting by another person of his/her choice as a support person.
- Organise a process of mediation if a complaint cannot be satisfactorily resolved by the school.

Serious or repeated complaints, or allegations of misconduct

Where complaints relate to an allegation of physical, emotional or sexual abuse, or when complaints are sufficiently serious or repeated, the principal will take action to report the matter to the appropriate authorities (Victoria Police, DHHS, CEM) to ensure a comprehensive investigation, and to work with all parties to facilitate a resolution.

Informal Resolution Process

In less serious matters in which there is no risk of harm to any person, those involved will be encouraged to deal with the issue personally. Normally this would mean that the relevant people would discuss the issue of concern with a view to reaching an amicable resolution.

Avenues of appeal

If a complaint remains unresolved, or if the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcomes, the complainant has the right to seek other avenues of appeal through authorities such as Catholic Education Melbourne.

Points to Be Kept In Mind

To order to gain a mutually acceptable resolution of grievances in a fair, reasonable and equitable manner within an atmosphere of mutual respect, dignity and compassion, the focus should be on conciliation. This may be achieved by facilitating a meeting or meetings between the relevant parties or by discussing the issue with the parties separately. Other individuals who may be able to assist should be consulted.

Resolution

Typically, the outcomes of successful conciliation may be that:

- The parties resolve their differences.
- The complaint is withdrawn.
- A reasonable compromise is agreed upon.
- A verbal or written apology.
- Disciplinary action.

On rare occasions where resolution is unlikely, a decision will be made with the best learning outcome for all students considered paramount. This is ultimately a school/parish decision. If a complaint is not upheld or not substantiated (e.g. there is insufficient evidence) but some issues come out of the investigation that are required to be addressed then, possible outcomes include:

- Relevant training for employees and/or students;
- Monitoring of the behaviour of employees and/or students;
- Counselling for the aggrieved person;
- Mediation at the local level.

If the complaint is proved not to have happened at all, or if there is evidence that the complaint was made with the main purpose or intent of causing distress to the other named as the source of the grievance, the following are possible outcomes:

- Counselling for the person who made the complaint;
- A written apology from the person who made the complaint;
- An official warning;
- Referral for disciplinary action for students and staff;
- The relevant designated person will make sure that whatever outcome is decided upon actually occurs.

External Support

External support is available via the diocese and applies where advice or back-up services might be required in different contexts, e.g.:

- When threats of violence have been made and/or there are fears that threatening behaviours could escalate
- In the immediacy of a violent incident
- In the immediate aftermath of a violent incident
- In the immediate aftermath of a violent incident where legal ramifications and options for the parties involved need clarification.