

Complaints Resolution Policy



Procedure for resolving complaints

A complaint can be resolved using informal resolution processes and/or formal resolution processes. The approach taken should reflect the seriousness of the matter. For less serious matters, informal resolution processes should be explored prior to a formal resolution procedure. For more serious matters, or where informal approaches have been unsuccessful, a formal procedure may be appropriate.

The employer should endeavour to commence investigations into the complaint (whether informal or formal processes are being followed) within two working days of the receipt of the complaint.

For the purposes of complaint resolution processes:

- A person who makes a complaint is a Complainant; and
- A person about whose actions or behaviour a complaint relates is a Respondent.

The outcome of the complaint will be communicated to both the Complainant and Respondent.

Informal resolution processes

The informal options open to a Complainant to attempt to resolve a complaint include:

- Speaking directly with the Respondent about their behaviour or actions;
- Consulting with a Contact Officer for advice, support and assistance; and/or
- Reporting the matter to a member of the Leadership Team for assistance or to the Parish Priest if the complaint is about the Principal.

Informal resolution processes do not involve an investigation or making findings based on an investigation, but generally involve the parties coming to an understanding or agreement as to how the issues can be resolved.

Speaking directly with the Respondent

In the first instance, if the Complainant feels comfortable about speaking directly with the Respondent, this may be the quickest and easiest way of resolving the matter. The Complainant should address the issue with the Respondent in unambiguous terms and in plain language.

Consulting with a Contact Officer

If the Complainant does not feel comfortable about approaching the Respondent directly (this may be the case particularly where the Respondent is in a position of authority), the Complainant may prefer to seek the assistance of a Contact Officer. A Contact Officer can provide information and support to the Complainant and/or Respondent regarding bullying issues, including options for resolving the matter. Contact Officers do not take any action on behalf of the staff member such as approaching the Respondent or conducting mediation.

Reporting the matter to a member of the Leadership Team

The Complainant may report the matter to a member of the Leadership Team who can assist with exploring resolution strategies. This may include suggesting that the Complainant speak directly with the Respondent.

Where appropriate, and in consultation with the Complainant, the member of the Leadership Team may approach the Respondent and talk to them informally about the matter.

Other informal resolution options which may also be considered at this stage include:

- Facilitated discussion;
- Mediation; and
- Entering into mutual agreements on workplace practices.

Referral to formal investigation

Note that at this stage, if a matter raised is sufficiently serious such that a formal investigation is warranted, then the School reserves its right to take appropriate action in the circumstances, including referring the matter to formal internal investigation (see below).

Formal resolution processes – Internal

If a matter is not able to be resolved using informal resolution methods, or for more serious matters a formal process may be appropriate.

Lodging a formal complaint

A formal complaint can be made by a Complainant to the Principal or to Fr Noel Brady, the Parish Priest if the complaint is about the Principal. The complaint should be in writing and set out the details of the specific allegations including dates, times, locations, what happened, what was said, witnesses (if any), and steps already taken to attempt to resolve the matter. Wherever possible, it should be supported by relevant documentation. Note that a complaint may not be pursued if it relates to events that occurred more than 12 months ago.

Initial response

Following receipt of a formal complaint, the Principal (or delegate if the complaint is about the Principal) will meet with the Complainant to discuss the complaint. This will involve canvassing options for resolution which may include informal resolution processes. In the event that the complaint is to be dealt with formally, the Complainant will be informed of:

- How the complaint will be investigated (e.g. interviews, viewing documents);
- The expected timeframe for any investigation;
- Who can be present at investigation interviews;
- What support is available for persons involved in the process;
- The interim measures, if any, that will be implemented to ensure the health, safety and welfare of any person pending the resolution of the complaint; and
- If the complaint raises issues which place the School under a legal obligation to report the matter to law enforcement agencies.

Formal internal investigation

Where appropriate, a formal investigation may be conducted into a complaint. An Investigating Officer will be appointed to conduct the investigation. The Investigating Officer is someone who is independent and will conduct the investigation impartially. The Investigating Officer will:

- Interview the parties involved, and witnesses if any;
- Review relevant evidence, such as emails and other documentary evidence; and
- Report on whether or not the complaint is substantiated.

Investigation outcomes and action to be taken

If a complaint is substantiated, appropriate action, will be taken which may include:

- An apology;

- Changes to work practices;
- Disciplinary action, including dismissal;
- An undertaking that the behaviour will not be repeated;
- Reversal of an action or decision or substitution of a different action or decision; and/or
- Training.

Assistance may also be offered to a Complainant or other persons involved which may include:

- Counselling;
- Redressing any inequality resulting from the action or decision the subject of the complaint;
- Mentoring and support.

If an investigation is inconclusive (i.e. a complaint cannot be proved due to a lack of evidence) further action may nevertheless be taken which may include counselling, mediation, changed working arrangements and/or conducting training for employees on relevant policies.

Formal complaint – External

A Complainant may choose to seek assistance or information at any time during the process from statutory support agencies in Victoria. Information and contact details for the support agencies are outlined in Appendix 2. Each agency will have specific requirements for lodging a complaint and will have varied investigation procedures.

In dealing with complaints, the School may seek external advice and assistance from professional mediators, investigators, external agencies and any other appropriate persons.

Confidentiality

Anyone involved in a complaint of bullying or its investigation, must ensure that the circumstances and facts of the complaint are disclosed only to those people who are directly involved in progressing its investigation and resolution. In particular, it is important that staff who either make a complaint, or who may be witnesses to the circumstances giving rise to the complaint, do not discuss the matter outside the investigation and resolution processes.

Counselling support

In confronting and/or resolving experiences of or allegations of bullying a staff member and his/her immediate family members may utilise the services of counselling support at any stage of the process. The School is a member of onPsych. The contact phone number for this support is 1300 659 350. The School Contact Officers can assist staff to access the service.

Vexatious claims

The School will not deal with complaints under this policy that:

- are made anonymously, without sufficient detail being provided so as to allow investigation or resolution of the matter;
- do not have sufficient detail so as to allow investigation or resolution of the matter;
- taken at their highest, do not constitute bullying as defined by this policy.

Where a Complainant makes frivolous, vexatious or malicious claims against a Respondent, for example, where false or misleading information is provided, relevant information is withheld, facts are distorted or there is no demonstrated commitment to resolution, then depending on the circumstances, disciplinary action may be taken against a Complainant.