St Joseph's Catholic PS, Mernda

Complaints Handling Policy

St Joseph's Mernda PS, Mernda is a school which operates with the consent of the Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne and is owned, operated and governed by Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools Ltd (MACS), where formation and education are based on the principles of Catholic doctrine, and where the teachers are outstanding in true doctrine and uprightness of life.

Rationale

St Joseph's Mernda PS, Mernda is committed to building a school community that features positive and respectful relationships. Within our school, relationships are founded in the Gospel values of justice, compassion, reconciliation and kindness. Such relationships support the learning and development of students and value the innate dignity of each person. It is important that each member of the community, including staff, parents and students, are contributors to the building of the school community. A timely and professional response to parent complaints is an effective means of encouraging communication, building trust and resolving issues for the betterment of all concerned.

St Joseph's Mernda PS, Mernda understands that from time to time complaints arise regarding aspects of our school's operation of programs and activities, and that it is important that all members of the community have the opportunity to be heard St Joseph's Mernda PS, Mernda commits to ensuring procedural fairness is observed when dealing with complaints and grievances.

Positive, clear and effective procedures and processes for resolving grievances between the school and community members can assist in building strong relationships, dispelling anxiety and ultimately providing students with a settled and happy learning environment.

St Joseph's Mernda PS, Mernda Codes of Conduct for parents/guardians/carers and students outline the expectations for behaviour for members of our community. The following procedures relate to any concerns that members of the community may have – whether these are serious grievance issues, or relatively minor concerns.

Aims

To develop and implement procedures and processes by which parents can confidently raise concerns in the knowledge that they will be listened to and their concerns will be professionally managed in a timely, confidential and appropriate manner.

Relationships with parents are important to us. We take complaints raised by parents seriously. There are many avenues for parents to provide feedback to school staff. These include

- annual formal parent survey
- formally scheduled parent feedback forums
- meetings with the Principal or other staff members to express concerns.

Who to contact to make a complaint

The nature of the complaint will determine who is the most appropriate person or body to manage a Complainant's concerns. In most instances, it is expected that the Complainant will have raised their complaint at St Joseph's Mernda PS, Mernda before taking it further with MACS.

Complaints should be directed to the school Principal in the first instance

For complaints of a serious nature involving school staff, the following additional information is provided.

Misconduct or serious misconduct

All complaints of alleged misconduct or serious misconduct by a teacher or staff member should be reported to the Principal of St Joseph's Mernda PS, Mernda.

Complaints about teachers can also be reported to the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT), the regulator in relation to the registration and investigation of serious misconduct (including conduct which is of a physical or emotional nature) of all teachers in the state of Victoria. If unsure whether the complaint constitutes serious misconduct by a teacher, contact the VIT on 1300 888 067 or vit@vit.vic.edu.au.

In some cases, certain actions which involve physical or emotional misconduct, such as unlawful assault or threats to the person, may constitute a criminal offence. These types of offences should be reported to and investigated by the police. Initial consultation with the Principal of St Joseph's Mernda PS, Mernda may help to determine the appropriate course of action in these circumstances.

Child abuse (including sexual offences)

All complaints of alleged child abuse (including sexual offences) of a school student should be reported to the Principal of St Joseph's Mernda PS, Mernda.

There are legal obligations on all adults to report child abuse to police once a reasonable belief is formed that a sexual offence has been committed against a child.

Failure to disclose a sexual offence against a child is a criminal offence under section 327 of the *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic.) and applies to all adults (18 years of age and over) in Victoria.

Communication with children under 16 years of age by teachers, staff or any other person to prepare or 'groom' a child for future sexual activity is a criminal offence under section 49M(1) of the Crimes Act and must be reported to the police. The offence of grooming applies to any person aged 18 years or over and does not apply to communication between people who are both under 18 years of age. For further information, refer to MACS Policy 2.19 Child Protection – Reporting obligations.

Complaints against Principal of St Joseph's Mernda PS, Mernda

In the case of a complaint involving the Principal of St Joseph's Mernda PS, Mernda, the MACS Regional General Manager who oversees St Joseph's Mernda PS, Mernda should be informed immediately.

MACS Regional Offices are located in the North, South, East and West of metropolitan Melbourne. Contact details are listed at the end of this Policy.

Complaints against clergy or other religious persons

If the complaint relates to the clergy or other religious persons involved with St Joseph's Mernda PS, Mernda, the Complainant should contact and seek advice from the Professional Standards Unit of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne, 486 Albert Street, East Melbourne. Contact 03 9926 5621 or psu@cam.org.au.

If the priest or religious person is a member of a religious order, the Complainant should also contact the Provincial Head or professional standards office of that congregation or religious order. If the complaint is about child abuse, see above.

Anonymous complaints

The governing body of St Joseph's Mernda PS, Mernda endeavours to address and respond to all complaints. In some situations, our governing body may not be able to fully address complaints that are made anonymously or without sufficient detail being provided to enable an inquiry or investigation, or resolution of the matter. To ensure procedural fairness, respondents have a right to know the particulars of the allegations being made against them and be given an opportunity to respond to them. Where possible, Complainants are encouraged to give their names and to be reassured that we will deal with complaints professionally and in accordance with procedural fairness and confidentiality. If the Complainant wishes to remain anonymous, it is at the Principal's discretion what, if any, action will be taken. Anonymous complaints will be recorded in the same manner as all other complaints are recorded.

Procedures for complaints about issues at St Joseph's Mernda PS, Mernda

St Joseph's Mernda PS, Mernda has developed and maintains a fair, effective and efficient complaint-handling
procedure so that complaints about events or decisions at St Joseph's Mernda PS, Mernda can be addressed. The following steps can guide the procedure in making a complaint about issues arising at St Joseph's Mernda PS, Mernda.

Informal and formal resolution procedures

Informal resolution procedures

Raise the matter directly with the relevant staff member first where appropriate. If the matter involves your child or an issue of everyday class operation, contact the staff member concerned, preferably by email, explaining the nature of your concern and request a telephone conversation or meeting. Complainants are strongly discouraged from sending or discussing confidential, contentious or emotional information by email. This is best done in a meeting or phone call.

The teacher will acknowledge the email within **two working days**. The staff member may be able to respond to your complaint by return email or telephone with a satisfactory outcome. At times, parties may be assisted to resolve a misunderstanding, miscommunication or lack of clarity through the support of another person, such as another member of staff or the principal.

If further inquiry of the complaint is required, the staff member will explain this to you and direct you to this Policy if you have not already viewed this. They will also establish a clear timeframe for the inquiry and when you can expect further information from them.

If the matter cannot be resolved informally, or you wish to make a formal complaint, you can telephone to make an appointment to discuss the matter with the Principal or email your concern in writing.

Formal resolution procedures

If the grievance or concern is about broader school issues, school staff or serious issues that are difficult to discuss with classroom teachers or if the issue not been satisfactorily resolved, Complainants are invited to make an appointment to speak with the Principal.

- In all cases, confidentiality is respected. Only the people who need to know about the issue will be involved. The people who need to be informed will be discussed at the meeting.
- Community members may be accompanied by a support person at appointments to resolve grievances.
- All formal discussions and procedures involving grievances will be documented.
- Every attempt will be made to address an issue and, where resolution is possible, it will be reached in a timely manner.

When a formal complaint is received, it will be acknowledged and the Complainant will be provided with a copy of this Policy so they can understand the procedures that will be followed in dealing with their complaint.

Timeframe for dealing with formal complaints

In moving to more formal procedures, the Principal or a senior member of staff will undertake the inquiry in the following manner, ensuring procedural fairness is observed:

- organise a meeting/phone conference with you
- direct you to a copy of this Policy if you have not already viewed this document
- at the outset, establish the timeframe for the inquiry into the matter and when you can expect to hear further information or have a resolution. This would normally be within 10 working days
- fully document the complaint, any actions taken to resolve it and outcomes of those actions
- further consider the matter
- ensure that no one is victimised as a result of a complaint being made
- if necessary, enable a Complainant to be accompanied at meetings by another person of their choice as a support person
- if appropriate, enable the person against whom the complaint has been made to respond, and to be accompanied to any meeting by another person of their choice as a support person
- advise the Complainant of the outcome of the inquiry in writing.

Recording complaints

All complaints received at St Joseph's Mernda PS, Mernda will be recorded, even those which are about issues perceived as trivial or minor. This helps us to identify key risk areas or any whole-school issues which, if left unresolved, could lead to harm or injury or more serious concerns.

The following information about complaints received will be recorded:

- contact details of the Complainant
- date of complaint and method of communication
- nature of the complaint and the requested resolution
- name of the staff member handling the issue
- any actions and the timeframe taken, minutes of meetings and communication
- a statement of the outcome, including the closure date and date of advising the Complainant of the outcome.

Expectations of and information for parents and guardians

In making a complaint, St Joseph's Mernda PS, Mernda requests and expects that the Complainant will:

- raise the concern or complaint as soon as possible after the issue has arisen
- communicate and respond in ways that are constructive, fair and respectful
- provide complete and factual information about the concern or complaint
- observe confidentiality and a respect for sensitive issues
- act in good faith to achieve an outcome acceptable to all parties
- have realistic and reasonable expectations about possible outcomes/remedies.

If your concern/complaint relates to your child's treatment by another student or students while at St Joseph's Mernda PS, Mernda, we expect that you will refer your complaint directly to the School, via your child's class teacher, Assistant Principal or Principal. Under no circumstances should you approach another student while in the care of the school to discuss the issue or chastise them. Direct contact with parents to resolve the matter is also discouraged if the complaint pertains to issues or incidents that have arisen at the School.

Parents and guardians making complaints should ascertain the facts as best they can, and contact the Principal at their earliest convenience.

- Parents and guardians with complaints may contact the School by telephone, in person or in writing.
- Parents and guardians visiting the School to make a complaint are advised that the Principal may not be immediately available to discuss the complaint.

However, details regarding the complaint can be taken by the office staff, and an appointment time can be made to meet with the Principal.

Parents and guardians making complaints are to be respectful, confidential and courteous. Parents who are unreasonable, threatening or discourteous can expect their discussions with the Principal to be terminated until such time as an alternative discussion time is arranged by the school.

The School will record the details of all complaints including the name and contact details of the persons making the complaints. The School will then refer the complaint to the most appropriate person to undertake an inquiry. There will be many occasions that this will be someone other than the Principal. The staff member conducting the inquiry may conduct a preliminary inquiry or communicate with the parent to discuss the matter further.

If the scope of the inquiry is beyond the capacity or jurisdiction of the school, the matter will be referred to the MACS Regional General Manager and the parent will be informed of the referral.

Parents and guardians discussing complaints with the Principal may be accompanied by a support person. The support person can be a family member, a friend or a professional with knowledge of the student. Any person acting in a professional capacity on behalf of the parents must provide their occupational details and full name prior to the meeting being held. It is at the Principal's discretion whether an external professional is a participating member of any school meeting. The support person may encourage and facilitate sharing of parent knowledge, perception and issues. The support person should support a positive working relationship between all parties. The support person does not speak on behalf of parents/guardians/carers discussing complaints with the Principal.

Any inquiry conducted by the School will be done so in a timely, efficient and confidential manner, ensuring the fair principles of natural justice are applied for all. Parents will be provided with an anticipated timeframe for a resolution. The staff member conducting the inquiry will record the details of the inquiry.

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.

Outcomes of complaints

Outcomes to complaints and grievances can include the following:

- apology – either verbal or written
- mediation – with an internal or external mediator
- official warning
- disciplinary action
- behavioural contract (in the case of a student)
- pastoral or spiritual care
- an understanding that the behaviour will not be repeated
- a change in policy or procedure.

Complaint escalation

If the matter cannot be resolved at the School level, or if the complaint is about the Principal of St Joseph's Mernda PS, Mernda, Complainants may contact the relevant MACS Regional Office (see details below).

When a complaint is serious or it is not resolved after the involvement of the MACS Regional General Manager, it may be referred to the MACS Executive Director for review.

If the complaint is unable to be resolved to the satisfaction of the Complainant, but the matter is however finalised, the Complainant has the right to seek alternative independent or other advice, or contact other entities such as the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd or the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

Withdrawal of a complaint

A complaint can be withdrawn at any stage during the complaint management procedures. A complaint should be retracted in writing by the Complainant and addressed to the relevant MACS Regional General Manager.

MACS Regional Office contact details

Complainants can lodge a complaint to be referred to the MACS Regional General Manager of the relevant school zone via email or telephone as per contact details below:

Eastern Regional Office 39 Hewish Road CROYDON VIC 3136 Ph: 03 9427 6400 Email: ero@macs.vic.edu.au	Northern Regional Office 25 Norwood Crescent MOONEE PONDS VIC 3039 Ph: 03 8387 3200 Email: nro@macs.vic.edu.au
Southern Regional Office 602 South Road MOORABBIN EAST VIC 3189 Ph: 03 8301 7400 Email: sro@macs.vic.edu.au	Western Regional Office 47 Synnot Street WERRIBEE VIC 3030 Ph: 03 8412 2400 Email: wro@macs.vic.edu.au

Complaints can also be lodged via the MACS website www.macs.vic.edu.au under *Contact Us / Feedback*. Refer to the complaints 'Resolve form'.