



ST MONICA'S COLLEGE, EPPING

COMPLAINTS POLICY

Preamble

In a Catholic school, pastoral care involves concern for the growth and wellbeing of both staff and students. At St Monica's College, we are committed to ensuring that all staff and students work in an environment where mutual respect is both conveyed and promoted.

We strive to be a community where communication takes place in an environment of transparency, respect, compassion, acceptance and inclusion in the interests of all staff and students.

This policy aims to enhance pastoral care provision, as well as meeting our obligations of addressing the legitimate concerns of those within our community.

As a College committed to Restorative Practices, we aim to resolve and achieve positive outcomes when dealing with grievances and complaints from staff, parents, guardians, carers and students.

Definitions

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with an action taken, decision made, service provided or handling of an issue at St Monica's College, Epping.

Guiding Principles

The St Monica's College, Epping Complaints Policy has been formulated as per the guidelines specified in the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd, *Complaints Management: Practical Guide for Schools.* (June 2017).

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

- Work with respect, courtesy and openness and with a genuine desire to achieve a fair and reasonable outcome
- The complaint will be resolved as quickly as possible
- 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
- The 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 College will provide person(s) with options for having the outcome reviewed or mediated via an external authority
- The communal needs of the College community will in most instances exceed the needs of any individual.

Policy

1. Expectations of Complainants

In making a complaint, the College requests and expects that complainants 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 a concern/complaint relates to treatment by another student or students while at school, the College expects complaints will be directly referred to the College, via the relevant Home Room teacher or Year Level Leader.

Under no circumstances should complainants approach a student while they are in the care of the College to confront the issue.

Direct contact with parents/guardians by complainants to resolve the matter is also discouraged where complaints or concerns pertain to issues or incidents that have arisen at the College.

2. Contact

In most instances matters can be directly referred to the following people:

- Home Room Teacher
- Year Level Leader
- Campus Director
- Business Manager.

If there is any uncertainty about the most appropriate person to address a concern or complaint, contact the College Reception. Reception staff will refer complaints to the appropriate person. Alternatively the College can be contacted via email.

[A Complaints Form can be accessed via the College website here.](#)

3. Confidential, Contentious and/or Sensitive Matters

Parents/Guardians and staff are strongly discouraged from sending or discussing confidential, contentious and/or emotional information via email or other electronic modes (eg social media). These matters are best discussed face to face or over the phone. The College email systems are monitored and should not be considered private.

4. Resolution of Complaints

There are both formal and informal options for the resolution of a grievance or complaint. Use of informal options is recommended in the first instance as it may prevent the escalation of a minor dispute to a more serious complaint. Contact with the College may resolve the matter through informal conversations and/or contact. Matters requiring formal complaints resolution will be referred directly to the relevant Campus Director.

4.1 Informal options

Self-resolution – The parties themselves may resolve concerns in open discussion with the provision of relevant information or the clarification of issues. This option involves reflection and conversations respectful of each person's needs in the school.

Supported self-resolution – The parties may be assisted to resolve a possible misunderstanding, miscommunication or lack of clarity about the issue in question by a support person such as a colleague, supervisor, principal, College leader or counsellor providing professional advice or support.

Facilitated mediation – The parties may be assisted by a facilitator who is trained in mediation to identify issues, explore options and consider alternatives to find a resolution. The facilitator may be an external mediator, a senior colleague, a supervisor, a principal, a College leader or a counsellor.

In circumstances where no mutually acceptable resolution to the matter is reached through informal resolution, or in cases where the matter is considered to be serious, formal procedures should be referred to the relevant Campus Director.

4.2 Formal options

Intervention – The Campus Director or Principal may meet with the party, or parties separately or jointly. If this does not resolve the issue then the College makes a decision and notifies the parties of that decision.

Investigation – A complaint about a person concerning an alleged serious breach of legislation, College policy or procedure may require an investigation. The Campus Director or Principal will initiate and conduct this process.

The most desirable outcome in all cases of complaints would be the:

- determination, as early as possible, as to whether there has been any unsatisfactory practice or action
- implementation of a change designed to bring about better educational and pastoral outcomes
- achievement of a reconciliation between the parties
- establishment of renewed and restored confidence in the relationship
- inappropriate behaviour and/or action ceases.

5. Complaints handling

College personnel managing complaints will:

- Record contact details of the complainant, the details and nature of the complaint, the processes followed and a statement or outcome or resolution
- Treat complaints seriously
- Respect the right of all parties to be heard and treated fairly
- Further and fully investigate the matter
- Fully document the complaint, any actions taken to resolve it and outcomes of those actions
- Ensure that no one is victimised as a result of a complaint being made
- 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 respond, and to be accompanied to any meeting by another person of his/her choice as a support person
- Appropriately communicate the reason why any decision and any action is taken
- Adhere to privacy obligations
- Organise a process of mediation if a complaint cannot be satisfactorily resolved by the College.

6. Confidentiality

Complaints will be treated with respect and sensitivity. It may not be possible that all communication, documentation or information supplied to the College, will necessarily be kept confidential. The College endeavours to deal with complaints with discretion, but reserves the right to disclose details pertaining to the matter to other person(s) who in the College's opinion need to be informed in order to facilitate resolution of the complaint. This may also apply to the College consulting advice from legal advisors.

7. Unacceptable conduct

The College will terminate any interaction with complainants where behaviour is deemed unacceptable.

Complainants are required to express their concerns in a calm and respectful manner towards all persons who may be involved.

Anonymous concerns or complaints that cannot be satisfactorily investigated by the College and/or confirmed as genuine, may be dismissed.

The College reserves the right not to respond to messages which contain abuse, inflammatory statements or material clearly intended to intimidate.

8. Matters to be referred directly to the Principal

Improper behaviour (i.e. behaviour which may be offensive sexually, physically, emotionally or socially).

Significant breaches of accepted professional/academic practice e.g. non-compliance with documented or accepted College procedures.

As with other complaints, under normal circumstances, the subject of this serious type of complaint will be informed immediately.

The Principal may report the matter to the Victorian Institute of Teaching, Catholic Education Melbourne, Victoria Police or another body.

9. Avenues of appeal

If a complaint remains unresolved or if the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome, the complainant has the right to seek other avenue of appeal including contacting Catholic Education Melbourne.

This Policy was approved by the College Board in October 2017 and will be reviewed in 2020.