



# Complaints and Grievance Policy

*St. Joseph's School, Brunswick West*

*Date of initial policy completion: 2014*

*Reviewed: March, 2018*

## Vision Statement

St Joseph's School, Brunswick West, is a Catholic parish primary school founded on a century of care and excellence. As members of the people of God, we base our lives on the life and teachings of Christ and are also guided by the faith and service of Saint Mary MacKillop and the Sisters of St Joseph, 'to never see a need without doing something about it'.

Our commitment to quality, contemporary education nurtures a passion for learning where all are respected and valued.

We aim to develop active global citizens with the skills for the 21st century.

We encourage our school values of responsibility, empathy, honesty and respect in our relationships.

We recognise the important role that the parish, families and the wider community play in enriching our learning. In our partnerships we welcome and celebrate diversity, creativity, courage and compassion.

St Joseph's: united in friendship, faith and a love of learning

## Rationale

At St Joseph's School, we believe that the relationship between home and school is a very important part of ensuring that children and young people are happy, secure and open to learning. We recognise that parents and staff need to work closely together to provide the best educational opportunities for our students. As a school community, we are committed to meeting the differing needs of the various members of our community. Trust and open and effective communication is central to achieving harmony amongst our community. We encourage discussion about students' progress with staff and to advise staff if any concerns exist so that all parties can work together to resolve the concerns as promptly and effectively as possible. The school acknowledges that misunderstandings and differences of opinion may occur from time to time and that these need to be resolved. The School has both a desire and a responsibility to ensure that high standards of conduct are maintained by students, staff and parents/caregivers at all times, and that complaints are managed and resolved fairly, effectively and promptly, in a non-judgemental manner where parents and students are treated fairly and given ample opportunity to present their views.

Complaints occur when a student, employee or parent complains that an action or decision has been taken (or not taken) at the School that he/she believes to be in breach of relevant legislation, Order or Policy, infringes upon the principles of merit and equity or is otherwise unreasonable.

The School recognises the rights of its students, employees or parents to register a complaint about any decision, behaviour, act or omission that they feel is unfair, discriminatory or unjustified.

Where parents or students are dissatisfied with the school's response or feel that the complaint remains unresolved, they may seek further resolution via *Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM)*. CEM has specialised policies, guidelines and procedures to cover certain types of complaints that may occur in schools (for example, serious misconduct). This policy is not intended to replace any such specialised policies, guidelines or procedures but rather provide direction in how to deal with student, employee or parent complaints at a local School level.

## Purpose

The purpose of the school's *Complaints & Grievances Policy* is to establish clear guidelines for responding to and resolving concerns raised by parents, caregivers or students. The policy ensures that:

- The school and the relevant regional office (Northern) meets its obligation to respond to parent, caregiver or students complaints in a fair, effective and efficient manner.
- Parents, caregivers and students are informed of how they may raise their concerns or complaint with the school.
- A formal and transparent process for resolving complaints is maintained and communicated to all members of the school community.

This policy does not apply to critical incidents, emergency management, criminal offences, conduct of religious clergy or other religious individuals. Alleged criminal or unlawful behaviour should be referred to the appropriate authorities immediately.

## Definitions

A **'parent'**, in relation to a child, includes a guardian and every person who has parental responsibility for the child including parental responsibility under the Family Law Act 1975 (Cth) and any person with whom a child normally or regularly resides. (Definition taken from the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*).

A **'concern'** is an issues of interest (because of its importance and effect) which is raised informally in order to improve or change a situation. An example of a concern may be:

*I believe that the school's physical education policy and program is inadequate. I don't think that it caters for students who have well-developed skills and who need to be involved in competitive sport. I think the school should review its policy in this area.*

A **'complaint'** is an expression of grievance or resentment where the complainant is seeking redress or justice. An example of a complaint may be:

*My daughter has been left out of the school's netball team for the third time in a row. She is an accomplished netballer and deserves to be part of the team. It is not fair that she is left out and I want you to do something about it!*

## Making a Complaint: Information for Students

At our School and at the Before and After School Care Program, we believe that it is important that everyone feels happy and safe so that the best learning can take place. We believe that everyone - staff, parents and students - need to work closely together to provide the best educational opportunities for you. If you have a problem, a concern or a complaint, we encourage you to speak to someone about it and we have provided some steps that you might work through to help you do this.

### *What to do if you have a problem:*

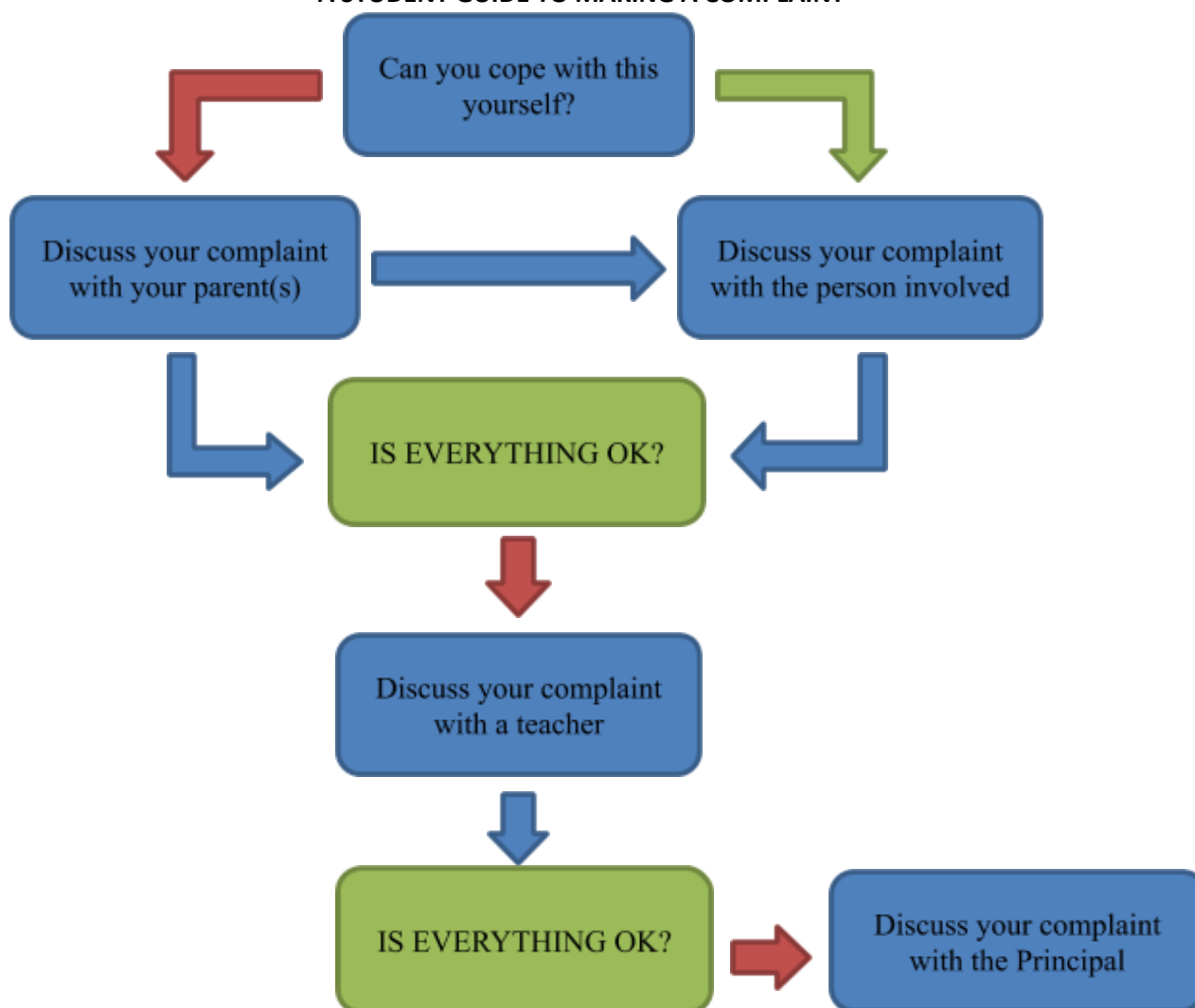
- Try to identify the problem that is upsetting you. If there is more than one problem, list them so that you are clear about what you feel or need.
- If you feel you can, talk to the person you are having the problem with and if their behaviour is upsetting you, tell them to stop.
- Often parents can help when young people are unsure of what to do. It is a good idea to ask for support and advice when problems arise rather than keep it all to yourself.

- If your talk with the person you are having the problem with does not solve your problem, talk to a staff member about your concerns and ask them to help you deal with it. The staff member will often be able to give you good ideas on how to cope with it and will help you. You should explain:
  - Who was involved
  - What happened
  - What you did
  - What you believe was unfair or unjust
- Try to stay calm when discussing your problem or concern. Even if you don't feel it, being calm will help you get your concerns across more clearly than if you are upset or angry. It may help to take someone with you.
- Work with the staff member to decide what should be done to help you.
- If you still do not feel that the matter has been solved, make an appointment to talk to another staff member at our school. If you still do not feel that the matter has been solved, make a time to talk to the Principal about your concern.

### Remember:

- Sometimes the person helping you will need to speak to someone else so that the problem can be solved. You need to let that person know that you are OK about that.
- You can bring a friend, parent or a teacher to support you when you need to talk about the problem.
- No one will be allowed to pick on you or hurt you because you made a complaint.
- If you want to, you can write out your complaint in a letter instead of talking about it, but the person helping you will need to speak to you later.

#### A STUDENT GUIDE TO MAKING A COMPLAINT



## Making a Complaint: Information for Parents

### *What to do if you have a problem:*

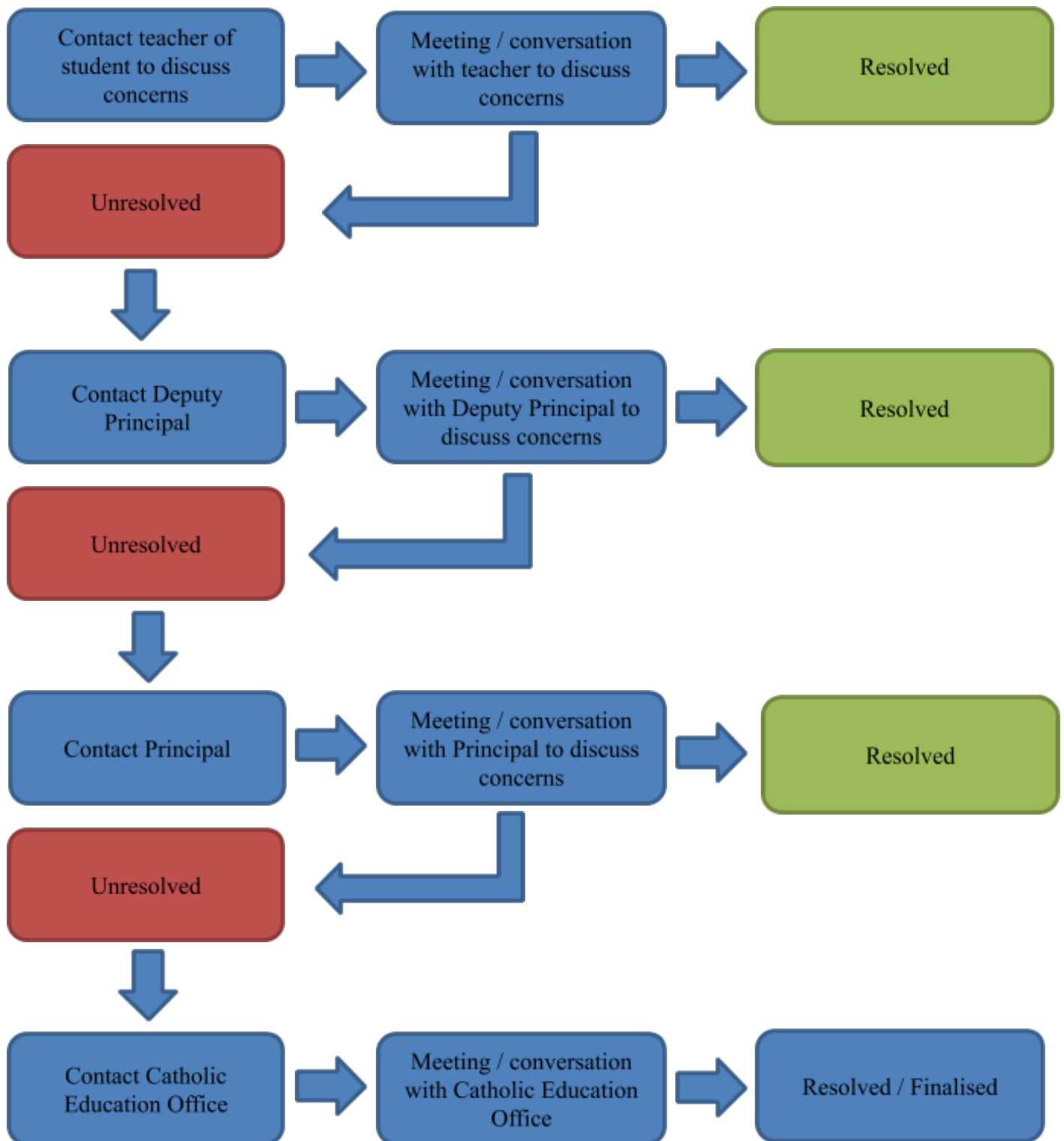
- Try to identify the problem clearly before contacting the School. If more than one problem exists, list them to ensure that the extent of the problem is clear;
- Decide whether the problem is a concern, enquiry or complaint. That will help in finding a solution;
- Make an appointment to meet with the student's class teacher. The best way to do this is to contact the School office to arrange a mutually convenient time for a telephone call or meeting;
- If you do not feel after your meeting that the matter has been resolved or if you have a complaint about a staff member, make arrangements to meet with the Deputy Principal;
- Try to stay calm when discussing your concern. Even if you don't feel it, being calm will help you get your concerns across more clearly than if you are upset or angry. It may help to take someone with you;
- Remember, the staff are committed to resolving any issues that parents might have regarding students and will discuss with you actions that might be taken in regard to your concern;
- If you still do not feel that the matter has been resolved or if your complaint is about a very serious matter, send your complaint in writing to the Principal; and
- If this does not resolve the issue or if your complaint is about a very serious matter, send your complaint in writing to the Northern Regional Manager at the Catholic Education Office Melbourne.

Note: The Victorian Department of Education and Training and/or the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority **DO NOT** deal with complaints within the Catholic Education system.

### *When you make a complaint:*

- If a complaint is made against a person, that person will be informed of the nature and content of the complaint and have the right to respond.
- Discussions of complaints are confidential.
- Complaints may be made verbally or in writing.
- All complaints, the actions taken to resolve them and outcomes of those actions will be fully documented.
- A person who has made a complaint may withdraw it at any time. If the complaint is in writing, the withdrawal should also be in writing.
- No one will be victimised as a result of taking out a formal grievance.
- At the formal stage, a person who has made a complaint has the right to be supported by another person of his/her choice.
- A process of mediation may be available if a complaint is not satisfactorily resolved.

## A PARENTAL GUIDE TO MAKING A COMPLAINT



## Making a Complaint: Information for Staff

At St Joseph's we believe that the relationship between colleagues is a very important part of ensuring that children are happy, secure and open to learning. We recognise that all staff need to work closely together to provide the best educational opportunities for the students in our care. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding any other member of the school community, we strongly encourage you to work together to resolve these as promptly and effectively as we can.

### *What to do if you have a problem:*

- Try to identify the problem clearly before taking any action. If there is more than one problem, list them to ensure that the extent of the problem is clear to the School.
- Decide whether the problem is a concern, enquiry or complaint. This will help in finding a solution.
- In the interests of resolving matters quickly and effectively, you are encouraged to informally discuss your concern/complaint with the person concerned.
- If informal strategies do not resolve the issue, make your complaint formally and in writing to the Principal. Where the Principal advises, mediation can be arranged between the parties concerned on their mutual agreement.
- If you still do not feel that the matter has been resolved or involves the Principal, contact the Parish Priest.
- If matters still remain unresolved you have the right to seek arbitration through the courts, legal and/or union representation and other government commissions such as Workplace Safety, Anti-Discrimination and Human Rights Commissions. These might entail financial cost to you.

Note: The Victorian Department of Education and Training and/or the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority **DO NOT** deal with complaints within the Catholic Education system.

### *When you decided to make a complaint:*

- If a complaint is made against a person, that person will be informed of the nature and content of the complaint and have the right to respond.
- Discussions of complaints are confidential.
- Complaints may be made verbally or in writing.
- All complaints, the actions taken to resolve them and outcomes of those actions will be fully documented.
- A person who has made a complaint may withdraw it at any time. If the complaint is in writing, the withdrawal should also be in writing.
- No one will be victimised as a result of making a complaint.
- At the formal stage, a person who has made a complaint has the right to be supported by another person eg. his/her union, work colleague, friend or other person of his/her choice as a support person.

## A STAFF MEMBER GUIDE TO MAKING A COMPLAINT

