



# POLICY

## Complaints Management - Schools

(CES Ltd Office)

June 2021

The school offers a broad, comprehensive curriculum imbued with an authentic Catholic understanding of Christ and his teaching, as well as a lived appreciation of membership of the Catholic Church.

The school is committed to ensuring this is a community of faith, hope and love where communication takes place in an environment of transparency, respect, compassion, tolerance and inclusion in the interests of all students.

The Catholic Education Sandhurst (CES) Limited Complaints Framework provides the key documents and elements of our approach to managing complaints that arise about the operation of Sandhurst Catholic schools. All schools must ensure the Complaints policies and procedures implemented at school level are consistent with this CES Limited Complaints Framework Policy.

### 1. Purpose

The school strives to be a community of faith, hope and love where communication takes place in an environment of transparency, respect, compassion, tolerance and inclusion in the interests of all students.

The purpose of this Complaints Management Policy is to:

- outline the process and guiding principles for managing complaints at our school
- ensure that our school meets its obligations to respond to complaints in a fair, equitable and efficient manner
- inform parents/guardians and students of how to lodge a complaint about the school
- outline the school's procedures and escalation process in complaints management
- outline the procedures to be followed by CES Limited Office when a matter has been referred from a Sandhurst Catholic school for investigation

The school has established procedures for responding to complaints which reflect the expectations of the CES Board as described in the CES Limited Complaints Management Framework and used to guide their development. The school's Complaints Management Policy and procedures are available on the school's website or by requesting a copy from the school.

## 2. Scope

This policy applies to complaints that should be able to be resolved at the school level that relate to:

- general issues of student behaviour that are contrary to the school student behaviour Policy including incidents of bullying or harassment
- learning programs, assessment and reporting of student learning
- communication with parents/guardians
- school enrolment, fees and payments
- general administrative issues

Any such actions will be in accordance with any legal and reporting obligations.

This policy also applies to the procedures to be followed when:

- complaints cannot be resolved at the school level and referred to CES Limited Office from the school community
- the school seeks assistance from CES Limited Office to resolve a complaint from a parent/guardian or student
- a complaint to referred from an external authority

Procedures for making a complaint are presented in Appendix 1 of this Policy.

This policy does not apply to complaints about critical incidents, matters included in the Victorian Reportable Conduct Scheme, emergency management, criminal offences or staff grievances.

If the matter relates to allegations of child abuse, Sandhurst Catholic schools and CES Limited will follow their procedures for responding to allegations of child abuse under various reporting obligations as outlined in the Child Safety Framework.

## 3. Principles

Addressing complaints or concerns within a framework of dignity and respect can provide powerful opportunities to model the love of Christ in the reality of our contemporary world and provides a valuable opportunity for reflection and learning.

In receiving and responding to complaints, the following guiding principles will apply:

- complainants can expect their concern or complaint to be responded to in a respectful and timely manner
- schools will be informed of formal complaints that are made about them
- complainants and the person(s) against whom the complaint is made have the right to be heard and to expect that the principles of procedural fairness will be observed

- confidentiality, protection of privacy, respect, access, dignity and impartiality will form the basis of the complaints resolution process
- the complaints resolution process will seek to achieve the restoration of good and respectful relationships

## 4. Policy Statement

The nature of the complaint will determine who is the most appropriate person or body to manage a complainant's concerns. The school staff will consider the matter raised and determine the most appropriate action that is likely to achieve prompt resolution.

Procedural fairness will apply to the handling of complaints.

Confidentiality will be maintained as far as reasonable.

Complaints received from parents/guardians and students are responded to in a timely manner

All complaints will be acknowledged within 2-5 business days and complainants will receive an indication of when they can expect to be notified of an outcome for their complaint, this would generally be within four weeks.

Complainants must be kept informed if there is any change to the time frame for dealing with their complaint.

The school endeavours to address and respond to all complaints. The school may not be able to fully address complaints that are made anonymously or without sufficient detail being provided to enable an 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. Anonymous complaints are recorded in the same manner as other complaints.

All complaints are recorded and securely stored with relevant levels of authorised access.

Complainants will be notified of the outcome of a formal complaint in writing.

The school has established procedures for responding to complaints appropriate to their local context, and the expectation is that most complaints are managed initially by the school.

The Complaints Policy and Procedures for the school is published on our website.

## 5. Complaints not covered in this Policy

This information is provided to assist parents/guardians and students to identify the best avenue for raising their complaint. The following types of complaints are not covered by this policy:

- **Misconduct or serious misconduct other than allegations of child abuse**

All complaints of alleged misconduct or serious misconduct by a staff member should be reported to the Principal of the school. Complaints about teachers can also be reported to the *Victorian Institute of Teaching* (VIT- [www.vit.vic.edu.au](http://www.vit.vic.edu.au)), which is the regulator in relation to the registration and investigation of serious misconduct of all teachers in the state of Victoria. The VIT can be contacted by telephone 1300 888 067 or email [vit@vit.vic.edu.au](mailto:vit@vit.vic.edu.au).

In some cases, certain actions which involve a sexual offence, 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 the school may help to determine the appropriate course of action in these circumstances.

- **Complaints against Principal of a school other than allegations of child abuse**

Complaints involving the Principal of a Sandhurst Catholic school should be made to the CES Limited Office and directed to the relevant Principal Consultant.

- **Complaints against clergy or other religious persons other than allegations of child abuse**

If a complaint relates to the clergy or other religious person at a school, the complainant should contact and seek advice from CES Limited Professional Standards representative (CES Assistant to the Executive Director: Pastoral Wellbeing).

If the priest or religious person is a member of a religious order, the complainant should also contact the Provincial Head or Professional Standards representative of that congregation or religious order. CES Limited will also notify the relevant school governing body of the Religious Institute to ensure that the complaint has been referred and investigated.



# PROCEDURES For making a Complaint - Schools (CES Ltd Office) June 2021

The school maintains a fair, equitable and efficient complaint handling process so that complaints about events or decisions at the school can be addressed at the local level in the first instance.

The following can assist parents/guardians and students when lodging a complaint about issues arising at a school:

## 1. Clarify the issue:

- Be clear about the topic or issue to be discussed, and to whom the complaint relates
- Be mindful of the need to ascertain all the facts relating to the circumstances of the topic or issue
- Consider what would be an acceptable outcome
- Read the school's Complaints Policy or Procedure.

## 2. With whom should the complaint be raised?

- In most cases, the first step is to raise the concern at the school with the staff member most closely associated with the complaint in the first instance. This may be a classroom teacher or a member of the school's leadership team. They may be able to resolve the complaint immediately through discussion on the telephone, by email or in person.
- Sometimes a teacher may refer to another member of staff or a member of the leadership team to assist in dealing with the complaint.
- Email is the preferred method to contact teachers. The complaint will be acknowledged within 2-5 business days.
- In some instances, however, if the complaint is deemed to be alleging serious misconduct or is not covered by the school's Complaints Policy, the complaint may be referred to the CES Limited Office.

- If the complaint relates to the Principal the complainant can contact the CES Limited Office via:
  - <https://cem.poloniouslive.com/webform/CESFeedbackForm>
  - post PO Box 477, Bendigo 3552
  - telephone 03 5443 2377

### 3. Process for dealing with complaints

- The principles of procedural fairness apply to the handling of complaints and includes:
  - respecting the right of all parties to be heard and treated fairly
  - responding to complaints promptly and thoroughly
  - if the complaint is about a person, providing that person the opportunity to respond to any allegations
  - ensuring the Complaints Policy and Procedure is clear to all parties
  - maintaining impartiality, substantiating the facts, appropriate communication including reasons for decisions or actions
  - complying with legal and privacy obligations
  - recording complaints on a secure database with appropriate access controls
- If requested, the complainant will be provided with a copy of this Policy and Procedures in order to clearly establish expectations at an early stage of the complaints handling process.
- The complaint will be acknowledged within 2-5 business days by email or telephone.
- If the complaint requires further investigation or to be referred to another member of staff, the complainant will be given a timeframe for when they can expect an outcome for the complaint. This would generally be four weeks from the date of acknowledgement. If it is necessary to extend this time frame, the complainant will be notified by a member of staff.
- To resolve the complaint, it will determine the substance of the complaint and whether consequential action is necessary. The investigation may involve interviewing relevant witnesses and examining relevant documents. The person against who the complaint has been made will be provided with details of the complaint and will have the opportunity to respond to any allegations which have been raised against them.
- Face to face meetings with the relevant parties may be held to achieve a resolution through discussion.

## 4. Complaints resolution

- Determine the best option to achieve resolution of the complaint.
  - Less serious complaints should be resolved promptly through facilitated communication
  - Serious complaints should be resolved as soon as possible using formal options such as intervention or investigation as determined appropriate to the situation.
  - Move to a formal option when an informal option has not led to resolution. This option will be initiated by the Principal, Deputy Principal or school leader or the complainant.
- The outcome of the complaint will be communicated to the complainant and, if applicable, to the person about whom the complaint was made. Details of any consequential actions may not be communicated with the complainant, particularly where it may breach the rights of privacy or contractual responsibilities.

## 5. Should the matter not be resolved

If the matter cannot be resolved at the school level, or if the complaint is about the Principal of the school, the CES Limited Office should be contacted via:

- <https://cem.poloniouslive.com/webform/CESFeedbackForm>
- post PO Box 477, Bendigo 3552
- telephone 03 5443 2377

## 6. Appeal

If the complaint is unable to be resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant, 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 Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) or the courts.