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| APPLICABLE TO      | CSO, school-based and Diocese staff   |
| DOCUMENT OWNER     | Director of Schools   |
| APPROVAL DATE      | 9 November 2018   |
| APPROVED BY        | CSO Leadership Team   |
| SCHOOL ACTIONS     | System policy: Schools must ensure that their school community is aware of the policy and procedures for complaint handling and for making them readily available.  |
| LAST REVIEW DATE/S | October 2013  |
| NEXT REVIEW DATE   | October 2021  |
| RELATED DOCUMENTS  | Complaints Resolution for Parents and Carers Procedure (2018)<br>Complaints Resolution for Staff Procedure (2018)<br>Anti-Bullying Policy for Students (2012)<br>Code of Conduct (2017)<br>Child Protection: Reporting Concerns for Children (2015)<br>Conditions of Enrolment (2018)<br>Continuum of School Improvement Process (2017)<br>Privacy Policy (2018)<br>School Community Code of Conduct (2018)<br>Wellbeing and Pastoral Care – Students Policy (2017)<br>Workplace Email and Network Usage Policy (2016)<br>Whistleblower Policy (2017) |

## Purpose

This policy aims to:

- Provide guidance on the approach to handle complaints fairly, efficiently and effectively.
- Inform continual improvement in the delivery of our education programs and services.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Complaints Resolution Procedures.

## Policy Statement

The Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle Catholic Schools Office (CSO) and schools in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle are committed to:

- Supporting an environment where issues and concerns can be raised.
- Providing a fair, efficient and accessible complaints handling process.
- Timely resolution of complaints, at the local level where possible.
- Strengthening the way we handle and resolve complaints.

## Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, the following definitions apply:

**Complaint:** An expression of dissatisfaction with an action taken, decision made or service provided, or the failure to provide a service, take action or make a decision.

A complaint is **resolved** when the complainant and school or CSO agree on an appropriate response or remedy.

A complaint is **finalised** when an Assistant Director or Head of Service has made a final determination on the matter after exhausting the processes set out in this policy and associated procedures.

A complaint is **unresolved** when agreement cannot be reached on a course of action and / or remedy, or if the remedy cannot be implemented.

## Scope

This policy applies to all CSO, school-based and Diocese staff receiving and managing complaints about an aspect of the CSO or school operations, services, staff, students, or people associated with the CSO or using CSO or school facilities.

This policy does not apply to matters where rights and processes for review and appeal already exist. These include:

- Student expulsions
- Complaints about staff that if upheld would constitute misconduct
- Student critical incident matters
- Where there is a risk of significant harm to a student; in which case the matter must be referred to the Office of Safeguarding as per the **Reporting Concerns for Children Policy**.
- Allegations of criminal conduct must be referred to NSW Police

## Guiding Principles

This policy is based on the following principles, which are informed by the *Australian Standard – Guidelines for complaint management in organisations (AS/NZS 100002:2014)*.

1. **Visibility:** We publish and make available information about how and where to make a complaint, as well as how a complaint will be handled. The actions taken to respond to a complaint are documented, including the reasons underpinning any decisions made.
2. **Accessibility:** Complaints can be made in person, by phone and in writing. Support will be given to parents with special needs, including enabling a parent to seek the services of an advocate.
3. **Responsiveness:** Complaints should be finalised promptly and all parties kept informed of progress and the reasons for any decisions and any resulting outcomes or actions.
4. **Objectivity:** We treat each complaint in an equitable, objective and unbiased manner.
5. **Cost:** There should be no cost to access our complaint-handling process.
6. **Protection of Privacy:** Personally identifiable information concerning any complaint should be actively protected from disclosure except where needed in relation to the complaint. This means that the complaint should only be discussed with those directly involved in the complaint-handling process.
7. **Student focused:** We are open to feedback including complaints and are committed to resolving complaints with the educational wellbeing of students as the first priority.
8. **Accountability:** We are committed to a fair, effective and efficient complaint-handling process, being accountable for decision making and complaint-handling performance and providing explanations and reasons for decisions.

9. **Continual improvement:** We regularly review our complaint-handling procedures for improvement and use complaint data and feedback to identify recurrent themes and to implement improvement measures where a need is identified.

## Responsibilities

### Director of Schools/CSO Leadership Team

- Foster a workplace that is respectful and productive and promote a culture that values complaint feedback and demonstrates commitment to the effective resolution of complaints.
- Ensure there is an effective, timely, impartial, and just system for dealing with complaints.
- Review systemic issues arising from formal complaints.
- Report publicly on complaint handling and resolution.

### Heads of Services

- Support a culture that values complaint feedback and their effective resolution in accordance with the policy and procedures.
- Determine escalated complaints, as appropriate.
- Support staff to handle complaints promptly and responsively.

### Parent Liaison Team

- Oversee the complaints resolution system, policy and associated procedures.
- Manage and respond to complaints when a parent believes that the school has not responded to their complaint in a fair, effective and timely manner or the response by the school to their complaint is unsatisfactory.
- Support staff to handle complaints promptly and responsively, including identifying and delivering on training needs.
- Identify and investigate systemic issues arising from complaints and recommend organisational improvements.
- Provide regular reports to the Director of Schools.

### Principals

- Respond to and address written and verbal complaints raised by parents from their school community.
- Ensure a record of all complaints is maintained at the school.
- Identify and support staff to manage complaints in accordance with this policy and procedures, encouraging staff to resolve concerns directly wherever possible.

### Complainants

- Provide a clear and honest account of concerns and expectations, including relevant information to assist in the investigation and/or resolution of the matter.
- Engage openly and in good faith, including participating in discussion with other parties to resolve concerns.
- Respond to requests for information within 10 working days.
- Respect the rights of those individuals involved in the complaint handling process.

### Respondents

- Provide all relevant information/documents to assist in the investigation and/or resolution of the matter.
- Engage openly and in good faith in the complaint handling process, including participating in discussion with other parties to resolve the concerns.
- Respond to requests for information within 10 working days.

- Respect the rights of those individuals involved in the complaint handling process.

#### **Staff**

- Respond to and manage complaints in accordance with this policy and procedures, as appropriate, resolving concerns directly wherever possible.
- Keep confidentiality about complaints at all times, including after a satisfactory resolution. This requires everyone, including the complainant, to ensure that information is restricted to those who genuinely need to know.
- Support all staff involved in the complaints process.

## Budget

An allocation to cover the costs associated with the implementation of this policy is made annually by the CSO.

## Legislative/Professional Guidelines

*Education Act 1990*

*Public Interest Disclosures Act 1994 (NSW)*

*Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)*