



ST CHARBEL'S COLLEGE

Resolving Parent/Caregiver Complaints Policy

Introduction

St Charbel's College is committed to living the values of the Gospel. In the spirit of justice, love and reconciliation, we aim to:

- Develop a positive and collaborative relationship between home and school.
- Welcome and value diversity of opinion. Inform the staff of the changing needs of students and families.
- Have clear and open communication within the community.

St Charbel's College acknowledges that Parents/Caregivers can sometimes feel concerned about something that they believe is happening in their child's school. The resolution of these concerns in every school community is vital to the well being and success of that community.

It is recognised that parents and caregivers must have access to processes that allow them to resolve concerns in a supportive, conciliatory environment and for this reason the following model has been developed.

This document is intended to be read in conjunction with the "Pathway for Resolving Parent/Carer Complaints" within the "Resolving Parent/Carer Complaints" brochure.

The scope of the guidelines

These Guidelines apply to the concerns of parents and care-givers about:

- Children's learning, behaviour and welfare.
- School organisation and management.
- Student health and safety issues.

Certain matters concerning Child Protection or other areas covered by specific legislation will be referred immediately to the relevant external agency.

The rights and responsibilities of parents/ caregivers

Any parent or caregiver has the right to raise a concern and have it responded to promptly, fairly, without fear of repercussions and according to principles of procedural fairness. Most concerns will be able to be resolved informally.

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Any parent/caregiver has the right to confidentiality in regard to a concern that is raised at the school. However, if others need to be informed, this will be explained to the parent /caregiver raising the concern.

Parents/caregivers have a responsibility to raise their concerns at the earliest possible time so that they do not become overwhelming for either the child or the family. The greatest success in resolving concerns is when they are addressed as soon as they arise.

Parents/ caregivers have a responsibility to maintain confidentiality in the best interests of their child and to ensure a just outcome for any other person who may be involved.

General principles

- Confidentiality will be respected and maintained by all parties.
- Concerns will be resolved according to the principles of procedural fairness as follows:
 - The person considering the concern will act impartially.
 - Anyone involved in the matter has the right to be heard fully.
 - All relevant information will be taken into account.
 - Where a conflict of interest arises or is perceived to arise, an independent person may be involved with the consent of all parties.
- Every endeavour will be made to address all concerns within reasonable timeframes and under mutual agreement. The resolution of concerns is most successful when prompt responses are obtained. However, Principals and school staff may not always be available to address concerns at the exact time they are raised, but will make an appointment to do so at the earliest mutually available time.
- Any person raising or responding to a concern may have a support person present during meetings or interviews. The support person would act as an observer but may take a more active role with the mutual agreement of all parties. Support persons must maintain confidentiality and other principles set out in these Guidelines. The Principal is to be advised of the attendance of a support person before any meeting or interview. Similarly the Principal will advise of any other person he/she may invite to attend.
- Accurate and appropriate notes will be kept with due regard to the confidentiality of the concerned parties.
- Access to relevant records may be given to parties directly involved in the process or to others by mutual consent whilst adhering to the conditions of the Commonwealth Privacy Act.

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- The outcome of a complaint resolution process will be communicated to the Parent/Caregiver in writing and there may be an agreement to review its effectiveness within an agreed timeframe.
- Anonymous complaints or allegations must be accepted and forwarded for investigation in the case of:
 - Allegations of child abuse.
 - Allegations of misconduct of a sexual nature by a staff member against a student.
 - Alleged breaches of legislation, including the crimes act.
 - Other alleged behaviour which could lead to disciplinary action if substantiated.
- The Principal has delegated authority to manage concerns and complaints at school. Where the matter involves Child Protection or other areas covered by specific legislation (such as matters being handled by Police or courts), the Principal is required to refer it to the School Board. In all other matters, every attempt will be made to resolve the matter at the level of the Principal.
- While it is understood that all concerns about a child's education and well-being naturally cause anxiety for parents/ caregivers, it is expected that complaints will be lodged in a manner that respects the dignity of the person receiving them. Similarly staff are expected to receive the complaint with the same level of respect.
- The Principal and staff are within their rights to require that any meeting or discussion be discontinued if a complainant becomes abusive, uses profane or threatening language or attempts to physically intimidate a staff member. Should this occur the complainant will be required to leave the school.

The process

To aid school communities in knowing how to handle a concern or complaint, a step-through visual model "A Pathway for Resolving Concerns and Complaints at School" has been developed for use in all Sydney Archdiocesan Catholic Schools.

Some key elements of the Model include:

Step 1

Generally, issues involving an individual child should be raised first with the person subject of the concern, usually the class teacher. This may not always be possible and the parents/caregivers may not feel able to talk to the person about whom they have a concern. In this instance the Deputy Principal is the appropriate person to address your concern:

- Where the concern involves improper conduct of a staff member of the school, the matter should be taken directly to the Principal.
- Where the concern involves the conduct of the Principal the School Board can be contacted.

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Step 2

Where the concern is not resolved, the matter should be taken up with the appropriate Stage or Year Coordinator.

Step 3

Where the concern is not resolved by the Year or Stage Coordinator, after all efforts have been made to do so the Parent/Caregiver should refer the concern to the Deputy Principal.

Step 4

Where the concern is not resolved by the Deputy Principal, after all efforts have been made to do so the Parent/Caregiver should refer the concern to the Principal.

Step 5

Where the concern is still not resolved by the Principal, or the concern is about the Principal, the Parent/Caregiver should refer the concern to the School Board via the Superior of the Lebanese Maronite Order. The Superior will refer the matter to the School Board for resolution.

If ultimately the Parent/Caregiver is not happy with the way their concern has been dealt with by the school or the School Board, they may wish to go to an external agency or legal advocate for advice and assistance.

College contact

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Facsimile: 02 9740 0900

A copy of the brochure Resolving Complaints, summarising these Guidelines can be obtained from the College.

Timeframes

Unless another timeframe is mutually agreed upon, or where outside authorities are involved, a Parent/Caregiver can expect:

- An acknowledgement of his/her concern within two (2) working days of lodgment at any of the steps in the "Pathway for Resolving Parent/Carer Complaints" process.
- An attempt to address and resolve the matter within seven (7) working days of lodgment at each step in the process.

Concerns and complaints of a child protection or legal nature

Legally required processes for the management of complaints that fall within the definitions of Child Protection legislation is administered by the Principal and is accountable to the NSW Ombudsman's Office and/or the Department of Community Services.

Where a teacher or Principal receives a complaint of this nature, he is required to inform the School Board. An investigation process will be undertaken that adheres to all of the general principles contained in these Guidelines.

If a complaint involving potential criminal activities is received by the Principal, he will be obliged to report it to the Local Area Command of the NSW Police.

The processes of any of the aforementioned outside authorities will take precedence over the processes contained in these Guidelines.

Schools are also compelled to comply with the relevant instructions contained in any court orders (eg Apprehended Violence Orders and Parenting Orders) that pertain to a student and/or a family within the school community.

Documents are to be filed in student/personnel files unless it is of a serious nature or a complaint re child protection, then it will be filed in a secure location separate to student/personnel files.

Related documents

Resolving Complaints brochure.

Conflict Resolution (Grievance Procedures).

Policy Anti Harassment Policy.