

RESOLUTION OF COMPLAINTS POLICY



Sydney Catholic Schools

Contents

1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE	3
2. SCOPE	3
3. GUIDING PRINCIPLES	3
4. OPTIONS FOR RESOLVING COMPLAINTS	4
5. MAINTAINING DOCUMENTATION	6
6. FURTHER INFORMATION	6
7. CLASSIFICATION	6

1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Within the reality of the schooling experience, it is recognised that, from time to time, misunderstandings and differences of opinion will occur that may give rise to complaints which need to be resolved satisfactorily. Complainants may be parents or carers, students, and school community members such as parishioners and the general community (e.g. school neighbours).

The purpose of this policy is to enable Sydney Catholic Schools (SCS) to respond effectively to complaints, ensure complaints are resolved in a fair and timely manner and make sure that complainants understand how their complaints will be managed.

All SCS staff and contractors must comply with this policy.

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to SCS parent, student, school community and general community complaints.

Complaints can be made to SCS in relation to any school-based or SCS Central Office decision or action, including allegations of staff misconduct.

There may be limited circumstances that impact SCS ability to respond to a complaint due to legal considerations or if other entities direct SCS not to handle the complaint (e.g. NSW Police for criminal matters).

3. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following principles guide how this policy will operate in practice:

- 3.1 Confidentiality, access, dignity, and impartiality form the basis of the complaint resolution process.
- 3.2 Stakeholders to the complaint process will work together with respect, courtesy, and openness.
- 3.3 Complaints are most effectively resolved when raised at the school level. Complainants are therefore encouraged to try to resolve the issue directly with the school in the first instance.
- 3.4 Complainants have the right to be heard and to expect that ongoing relationships will continue respectfully.
- 3.5 All complaints will be handled in a procedurally fair and timely manner. This includes staff members being informed of formal complaints made against them.
- 3.6 Where a complaint is received anonymously, it shall be considered and acted upon. However, as no interaction is possible with the complainant, the ability of the school or SCS to act upon the complaint may be limited. Similarly, if a complainant asks to remain anonymous, it may affect SCS's ability to investigate and resolve the complaint.

- 3.7 The availability of an independent review (where warranted) by Central Office is an integral component of the complaint resolution process.

4. OPTIONS FOR RESOLVING COMPLAINTS

4.1 How can school complaints be made?

Complaints are ideally raised with the school in the first instance. Complaints can be made in different ways e.g. by telephone, in person, or in writing (e.g. email).

4.2 Who can complaints be made to at school?

Complaints may be made to any member of staff at the school. Receipt of a complaint shall be acknowledged by the school and this can be done in person, by telephone, in writing or by email. A record of complaint acknowledgement must be retained.

4.3 How will complaints be managed by the school?

Often, the best outcomes arise when complaints are addressed to and quickly resolved with the classroom teacher or member of staff. In this situation, notes shall be kept by the staff member in relation to the matter including how the complaint was resolved.

Where the complaint cannot be immediately resolved, the school shall investigate the matter.

This will be done by an independent member of staff, not a subject of the complaint and free from any conflict of interest. This will usually be a member of the school leadership team. They will assess and manage the complaint, obtain sufficient information (e.g. relevant policies & procedures, student records etc) to allow for a proper assessment of the complaint and a timely resolution of the complaint.

Once the outcome of the complaint is determined, this will be shared with the complainant. This includes:

- the outcome of the complaint and any action to be taken
- the reasoning behind the decision
- options for review
- A request to keep the complaint confidential in the interests of respecting the privacy of both the complainant and any subject of the complaint.

4.4 Complaints raised outside the school

It is recognised that it sometimes may not be appropriate for a complaint to be raised directly with the school, for example where the complaint is about the school response to a complaint already raised directly with them, or if the complaint is about the conduct of the Principal.

Where this occurs, complaints can be made to School Operations Unit (SOU) within SCS Central Office. Complaints may be made in-person, by telephone, in writing (e.g. by email). Receipt of such a complaint shall be acknowledged and this can be done by telephone, in writing, by email or in-person. A record of complaint acknowledgement must be retained by Central Office.

4.5 How can I contact SCS School Operations Unit?

- SOU phone: (02) 9568 8130
- SOU email: sou@syd.catholic.edu.au

4.6 How will complaints be managed by the School Operations Unit?

The SOU will acknowledge and review the complaint, appoint a contact person for the complaint and work with the complainant, school and specialist personnel where appropriate (e.g. child protection, legal, student well-being).

Once an outcome of the complaint is determined this shall be shared with the complainant, including any action to be taken, the reasoning behind the decision and options for review.

4.7 Complaints about Central Office

Complaints concerning Central Office staff and/or decisions may be made to the Strategy, Policy & Governance directorate at (02) 9568 8215 or governance@syd.catholic.edu.au.

4.8 Review of Decisions

Complainants may request an independent review of the resolution of their complaint or the handling of the complaint. The request shall be in writing or via email to the Strategy, Policy & Governance directorate. The request must set out the reasons for the review request.

Strategy, Policy & Governance will determine if there is sufficient evidence to warrant the matter being reviewed. This will be undertaken by a senior SCS member within the directorate who has not previously been directly involved with the matter. If a review is not agreed to by Strategy, Policy & Governance the original decision will stand, and the complainant advised why the review will not proceed.

If a review is agreed to, a point of contact within Strategy, Policy & Governance will be established for the complainant. The reviewer will take all reasonable steps to gain relevant information from all parties and make a decision based upon the evidence. This may include appointing an independent investigator, who may be internal or external to the investigation to review the complaint.

Once the review is complete, the decision maker will be the Executive Director.

The outcome of the review is binding on all parties in the sense that a complainant entering into that process is aware that SCS will not entertain further appeal, and that both the school and the complainant are required to accept the outcome. However, it remains the strong preference of SCS that mutually acceptable outcomes be negotiated

wherever possible.

If a review recommends that the original decision should be modified or changed, Central Office will work with the school to provide a suitable resolution, based upon the findings of the decision maker. If the review concludes that the original decision should not be modified or changed, then the original decision will stand.

After the final decision in a review process, the complaint will not be reopened unless, in the opinion of the Executive Director, substantial new information has been presented that could potentially change the outcome. Substantial new information may include emergence of new documents, the discrediting of previous information that was crucial to the original finding, revelation of a conflict of interest etc.

5. MAINTAINING DOCUMENTATION

Documentation relating to complaints is to be maintained and kept confidential. The level of detail required will depend on the type of complaint that is raised.

At a minimum, those who are responsible for managing a complaint should retain file notes on any discussions about the complaint, including any contacts with the complainant. Where the complaint is identified by staff as more complex, it may be necessary to maintain more comprehensive notes and/or create a specific file. Documentation should include sufficient information about the complaint, any steps taken to manage the complaint, the outcome of the complaint and any follow-up actions taken in response.

6. FURTHER INFORMATION

If you have any questions about this document or would like further information, please contact Strategy, Policy and Governance on (02) 9568 8215 or governance@syd.catholic.edu.au.

7. CLASSIFICATION

Policy Number: SCS2020004

Document Rescinds / Replaces: EDO201604-1.1 September 2017

Policy Effective date: 21 September 2020

Review by: 21 September 2023

Approved by: Executive Director

Document Owner: Director: Strategy, Policy and Governance