



**POLICY FOR DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS
BY PARENTS/CAREGIVERS AND STUDENTS**

EXPLANATION OF POLICY

1. Rationale

The Board of Trustees at St. Mary's College is committed to promoting and maintaining an excellent teaching and learning environment and a safe and orderly school. At times parents/caregivers or others may have genuine cause for a concern regarding some aspect of their daughter's education or a school action. As the Board of Trustees values its partnership with parents and the school community, it will endeavour to deal with any complaint in an open, honest and fair manner according to the principles of natural justice.

2. Aims and objectives of the policy

This complaints policy aims to:

- Encourage the resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible;
- Ensure that concerns are dealt with quickly, fully and fairly and within clearly defined time limits;
- Provide effective responses and appropriate redress;
- Maintain good working relationships between all people involved with the school;
- Ensure that there is a fair and transparent professional procedure for dealing with any complaint.

3. Procedure

This policy also includes the procedures which the school will follow whenever it receives a complaint.

The procedure is divided into three stages. An explanation of the various stages is provided below.

4. Circumstances under which stages of the procedure should be missed out

In most cases any concern or complaint, regardless of whose attention it is initially brought to, should be discussed informally (stage 1) before being submitted at any of the following consecutive formal stages. However, occasionally there will be circumstances under which it is unsuitable for complaints to be dealt with in this way.

In all cases where the complaint concerns the school's principal directly, stage 2 will be missed out and the formal complaints procedure will begin at stage 3.

In some cases, it may be deemed inappropriate for individuals to discuss their concerns informally. In such cases, complainants may be directed to contact the principal directly (i.e. begin at stage 2). Complainants may choose to contact the principal directly of their own accord. In these cases it will be at the discretion of the principal as to whether or not it is appropriate for the complainant to discuss the matter informally (i.e. return to stage 1).

5. Who is allowed to complain?

This policy may be used by anyone who has a concern or complaint about any aspect of the school - Parents/Caregivers and students within the school community.

6. Monitoring complaints

At stages 2 and 3 of the complaints procedure the school will ensure that an accurate record of the complaint is kept including:

- The name of the complainant;
- The date and time at which complaint was made;
- The details of the complaint;
- The desired outcome of the complainant;
- How the complaint is investigated (including written records of interviews held);
- Results and conclusions of any investigation;
- Any action taken;
- The complainant's response (satisfaction or further pursuit of complaint).

7. Publicity and communication

Appropriate reference to this policy is published annually in the school newsletter and a copy of the policy is available on request from the school office. This policy may also be included, as appropriate, within the information given to new parents when their children join the school.

All staff and members of the board of trustees should be made aware of this policy including the various stages involved.

8. Confidentiality

All conversations and correspondence will be treated with discretion. Personal information will only be shared between staff on a 'need to know' basis. Notes and details of complaints will be kept in a confidential file at the school

9. Changes to time limits and deadlines

In general, any time limits contained within this policy should be adhered to. However, depending upon these circumstances the school is entitled to decide that it is impractical for any time limit to operate and may substitute a reasonable time for the applicable step.

10. Support

All parties to a complaint may bring a support person to any meeting where the issue(s) is to be discussed.

PROCEDURAL STAGES

STAGE 1: Informal discussion

1. Introduction

The vast majority of concerns and complaints can be dealt with informally. There are many occasions where concerns are resolved straight away without the need to submit a formal complaint. Many concerns raised at this level might not be classified as complaints.

2. Who to speak to informally

Individuals may decide to raise their concerns with a member of school administrative staff, class teacher, dean, head of department or the principal depending on the type of issues they want to discuss.

3. Monitoring

It is not necessary to record or monitor complaints at this level.

4. Time scales

There are no specific time limits for dealing with concerns at this stage. However, as at all stages, issues should be considered and dealt with as quickly and effectively as possible.

5. Response

The individual who raised the issue should be informed of any action to be taken to resolve the issue. If appropriate, this might be confirmed in writing.

6. Options for complainant

If the individual is dissatisfied with the response they have been given and would like to take their complaint further, they should be referred to the school's complaints procedure and told how to move on to the next stage

STAGE 2: Referral to the Principal

1. Introduction

At this age, if the informal discussions held in stage 1 have not resolved the issue the person making the complaint may either telephone or meet with the principal to discuss the matter to see as an informal resolution can be reached. If this has already occurred (i.e. the principle was the first point of contact in stage 1) this part of stage 2 can be skipped.

2. Submitting a formal written complaint

If the complaint is not able to be resolved to the satisfaction of both parties the person making the complaint should submit a complaint in writing to the principal. The written complaint should include details of the complaint and tell the school what the complainant would like the school to do as a result of the complaint.

3. Acknowledgement and time scales

The principal should acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing within 5 school days of receiving it.

4. The investigation

The principal may need to investigate the complaint and review any relevant documentation and information. If necessary, the principal will interview witnesses and take statements from those involved. If the complaint centres around a pupil, the pupil will also usually be interviewed.

5. Response

The principal will provide the complainant with a full written response within a reasonable period. This response will determine whether or not the complaint has been upheld, the reasons why, and what action (if any) will be taken.

6. Options for complainant

If the individual is dissatisfied with the response they have been given and would like to take their complaint further, they should be referred to the school's complaints procedure and told how to move on to the next stage.

STAGE 3: Referral to the Board of Trustees

1. Introduction

Complaints only rarely reach this formal level. Depending upon the nature of the complaint the board has a range of options for how the complaint is handled.

2. Submitting a formal written complaint

In all cases the person making the complaint should submit a complaint in writing to the board. The written complaint should include details of the complaint and tell the school what the complainant would like the school to do as a result of the complaint.

3. Acknowledgement

The receipt of letter of complaint is acknowledged by the board within 5 school days of receiving it and the complainant advised of the next steps in the board process.

4. Method of Dealing with Complaint

Depending upon the nature of the complaint, the board has the following options for dealing with the complaint:

- (a) the board as a whole may deal with the complaint;
- (b) the board may delegate any investigation into the complaint and/or determination of the complaint to a complaints' committee;
- (c) the board may delegate the board chair or other delegated representative of the board to handle any aspect of any investigation into the complaint and/or determine the complaint.

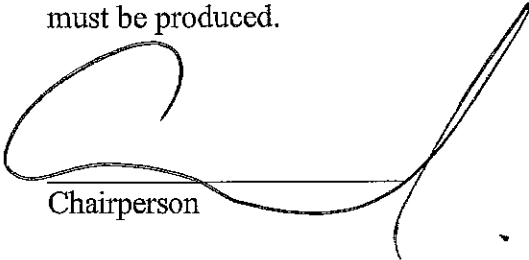
In each case the complaint may as appropriate be referred to relevant persons for reporting back to the board/committee/delegated member and the parties/relevant persons may be invited to speak to their complaint or answer questions. The board/committee/delegated member considers the evidence and/or information and comes to a decision or recommendation as to how the board will respond and/or what action will be taken.

5. Notification of board's decision

The board's decision or recommendation is communicated to the parties to the complaint within 5 school days of the decision having been made including reasons for the decision if appropriate.

6. Finality

The board recognises that not all complainants will be satisfied with the outcome of a complaint. The complainant may request the board to reconsider their decision. However normally for such a reconsideration to take place new information that would have been relevant to the board's deliberations must be produced.



Chairperson



Principal

Policy first adopted by BOT: 28 July 2003

BOT Reviewed: 27 February 2006

BOT Reviewed: March 2010

Next Review Date: March 2013