



# Star of the Sea College

## Grievance Policy & Procedure

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Star of the Sea College is a Catholic Independent Girls' school, founded by the Presentation Sisters in 1883. Since 2014, Star of the Sea has operated under the auspices of Kildare Ministries.

### RATIONALE

Staff and parents of Star of the Sea College are partners in the education and wellbeing of Star students. Effective communications play a vital role in this partnership, as does a shared commitment to addressing issues of concern in ways that are constructive, open and respectful.

The College acknowledges and understands that from time to time complaints arise regarding aspects of our College's operation of programs and activities and that it is important that all members of the community have the opportunity to be heard.

Every member of our school community has a right to have their grievance or complaint addressed, and we will work positively and resolutely with the aim of achieving a satisfactory outcome for the people involved. The College values relationships with the school community and welcomes all feedback. We take complaints seriously and commit to ensuring procedural fairness is observed when dealing with complaints and grievances.

Positive, clear and effective procedures and processes for resolving grievances between the school and community members can assist in building strong relationships, dispelling anxiety and ultimately providing students with a settled and happy learning environment.

This policy outlines our principles and procedures for **receiving and resolving complaints from parents or carers**, either on a specific parent-school concern or on behalf of their child. The College *Respectful Relationships Policy* outlines the expectations of behaviour for members of our community.

Procedures for receiving and responding to staff complaints are addressed separately in related policies – *Equal Opportunity Policy* and *Workplace Anti Bullying Policy*.

### Definition

A complaint or a grievance is an expression of dissatisfaction with an action taken, decision made, service provided or handling of an issue at the College. The dissatisfaction may arise from a perception that the College has done something wrong, failed to do something it should have or acted unfairly or inappropriately. The complaint may be about a staff member, a student or a policy or procedure.

### PRINCIPLES

In receiving and responding to complaints, the following guiding principles will direct and shape the College's actions:

- Complaints of a school-based nature are best received and managed at the school level, with parties involved expected to act in good faith and work together with respect, courtesy and openness to achieve a fair and reasonable outcome to all parties.



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- The complaint will be responded to as quickly as possible.
- The person(s) facing the complaint will be provided with detailed information about the substance of the complaint and will have the opportunity to respond.
- Personal information disclosed will be treated as confidential. The principles of confidentiality, protection of privacy, respect, access, dignity and impartiality will form the basis of the complaints resolution process.
- The resolution process will be grounded in sound and fair procedures for information sharing, conciliation, investigation and decision making.
- The complaints resolution process seeks to achieve the restoration of good and respectful relationships.
- If a satisfactory outcome cannot be achieved, the College will provide you with options for having the outcome reviewed or mediated via an external authority.
- The best interests of the school community together with the interests of the individual will be taken into account in the complaints resolution process.

### **College Expectations of People Making a Complaint**

In making a complaint, the College requests and expects that the complainant will:

- Raise the concern or complaint as soon as possible after the issue has arisen.
- Communicate and respond in ways that are constructive, fair and respectful.
- Provide complete and factual information about the concern or complaint.
- Observe confidentiality and a respect for sensitive issues.
- Act in good faith to achieve an outcome acceptable to all parties.
- Have realistic and reasonable expectations about possible outcomes/remedies.

If the concern/complaint relates to their child's treatment by another student or students while at school, the College expects that the complaint will be referred directly to the College, via their child's Mentor Teacher or Pastoral Leader. Under no circumstances should a parent approach another student of the College to confront the issue. Direct contact with parents to resolve the matter is also discouraged where the complaint or concern pertains to issues or incidents that have arisen at school.

### **WHO TO MAKE A COMPLAINT TO**

The nature of the complaint will determine who is the most appropriate person or body to manage the concerns raised.

### **Key Referral People or Bodies**

Parents are encouraged to make contact with members of the College staff who are most closely connected with their child and/or with the specific complaint. In most instances this will be one or more of the following:



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- The Mentor Teacher
- The Subject Teacher(s)
- The Pastoral Leader
- A Deputy Principal – Learning and Teaching /Students/Staff
- Head of Mission and Identity
- The Principal
- The Business Manager
- The College Counsellor

If there is any uncertainty about the most appropriate person to address an issue, concern or complaint, parents/carers are encouraged to contact the College on its direct line and speak to the Principal's Personal Assistant.

Depending on the nature of the complaint, Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools (MACS) and/or Kildare Ministries may be a point of reference in responding to and resolving a matter.

All complaints of alleged misconduct or serious misconduct by a teacher or staff member should be reported to the Principal.

Complaints about teachers can also be reported to the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) – the regulator in relation to the registration and investigation of serious misconduct (including conduct which is of a physical or emotional nature) of all teachers in the state of Victoria.

### **Serious or Repeated Complaints or Allegations of Misconduct – child protection procedures**

Where a complaint relates to an allegation of physical, emotional or sexual abuse, or when complaints are sufficiently serious or repeated, the Principal is under a legal obligation to report the matter to the appropriate authorities, ensure a comprehensive investigation, and work with all parties to facilitate a resolution.

If, in the course of carrying out their duties, a mandatory reporter forms a reasonable belief that a child is in need of protection from physical or sexual abuse, and that the child's parents are unwilling or unable to protect the child, they must report that belief to the Department of Health and Human Services/Child Protection, the Commission for Child and Young People (CCYP) and/or Victoria Police as described in the joint Protocol: **PROTECT: Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools**. The College's Child Safety policies and procedures apply.

### **Complaints against the Principal**

Complaints about the Principal should be referred to the College Board or Kildare Ministries. Complainants may also choose to contact MACS.



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### **Complaints against the Clergy or other persons involved in religious ministry**

Complaints relating to the clergy or other religious persons may be directed to the Professional Standards Unit of MACS. If the priest or religious person is a member of a religious order, the complainant should also contact the Provincial Head of Professional Standards Office of that congregation or religious order.

### **Anonymous complaints**

The College endeavours to address and respond to all complaints. In some situations, we may not be able to fully address complaints that are made anonymously or without sufficient detail being provided to enable an inquiry or resolution of the matter.

To ensure procedural fairness, respondents to a complaint have a right to know the particulars of the allegations being made against them and be given an opportunity to respond to them. Where possible, complainants are encouraged to give their names and to be reassured that we will deal with complaints professionally and in accordance with procedural fairness and confidentiality. If the complainant wishes to remain anonymous, it is at the Principal's discretion what, if any, action will be taken. Anonymous complaints will be recorded in the same manner that all other complaints are recorded.

### **Complaints in relation to Information Sharing Schemes**

The College is a prescribed Information Sharing Entity (ISE) that may share information under the Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS) and the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS).

The school, as an ISE, may receive complaints from individuals in relation to its conduct as an ISE under the CISS or FVISS. It may also receive a complaint from another ISE.

## **PROCEDURES FOR COMPLAINTS ABOUT ISSUES AT THE COLLEGE**

### **Email Communications**

Due to teachers' classroom and supervision duties, the first contact is best made by email, with an appointment request for either a phone conference or face-to-face meeting. The email should outline concerns or issues (eg. academic performance, discipline, student/peer incidents) so that the staff member can constructively prepare for the meeting/phone conference. Teachers are expected to respond in a timely manner (within 24 hours where practicable), and to do so by phone.

### **Confidential, Contentious and/or Sensitive Matters**

Parents and staff are strongly discouraged from sending or discussing confidential, contentious and/or emotional information via email. These matters are best discussed face to face or over the phone. The College email systems are monitored and should not be considered private.



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### Informal and Formal Resolution Processes

If initial communication between the parties does not resolve the complaint (an 'informal' resolution process), then the complainant should:

- Contact the Principal or a senior member of staff to make an appointment for either a phone conference or a face-to-face meeting
- Outline the nature of the complaint, either verbally or in writing, and the steps taken to resolve it.

In moving to a more formal process, the Principal or a senior member of staff will:

- Organise a meeting/phone conference
- Fully document the complaint
- Further and fully investigate the matter
- Ensure that no one is victimised as a result of a complaint being made
- Enable the person against whom the complaint has been made to respond, and to be accompanied to any meeting by another person of their choice as a support person
- Organise a process of mediation if a complaint cannot be satisfactorily resolved by the College.

### Outcomes of Complaints

Outcomes of complaints and grievances can include the following:

- an apology – either verbal or written
- mediation – with an internal or external mediator
- an official warning
- disciplinary action
- a behavioural contract (in the case of a student)
- pastoral or spiritual care
- an understanding that the behaviour will not be repeated
- a change in policy or procedure.

### Avenues of Appeal

If a complaint remains unresolved or if you are dissatisfied with the outcomes, the complainant has the right to seek other avenues of appeal by contacting the Chair of the College Board, Kildare Ministries or MACS.

### Complaints handling flowchart

The steps for effective and efficient complaint-handling are summarised as:

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| 1. Complainant clarifies issue to be discussed, ascertaining facts relating to the circumstances. |
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2. Email made to appropriate staff member at the College seeking to speak via telephone or face to face meeting. If in doubt about who to raise concern with, contact Principal's office.



3. Meeting takes place. If issue/complaint remains unresolved, request an appointment to discuss with the Principal or Deputy Principal of Students.



4. If issue still remains unresolved at the school level, complainants may contact Kildare Ministries or MACS.



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Responsible Officer	Deputy Principal – Students
Approved By	Principal
First Approved	2017
Last Reviewed	April 2022
Version	4
Review By	April 2025
Relevant Legislation	<p>Child, Wellbeing and Safety Act (2005) (Vic)</p> <p>Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)</p> <p>Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic)</p> <p>Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)</p> <p>Ministerial Order No 870 - <i>Child Safe Standards: Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools</i></p> <p>Ministerial Order No 1359: <i>Implementing the Child Safe Standards – Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools and School Boarding Premises.</i></p> <p>Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)</p> <p>Worker Screening Act 2020 (Vic)</p>
Related Policies & Procedures	<p>CEVN “Complaints Management: Practical Guide for Schools” June 2017</p> <p>Child Safety Policy</p> <p>Child Safety Code of Conduct</p> <p>Student Behaviour Management Policy</p> <p>Pastoral Care Policy</p> <p>Privacy Policy</p> <p>Fees Policy</p> <p>Enrolment Policy</p> <p>ICT student policy</p> <p>Respectful Relationships Policy</p> <p>Visitors to the School Policy</p> <p>Visitors and Volunteers Protocols</p> <p>Whistleblower Protection Policy</p>