

Complaints Handling Policy

Introduction

The Catholic Education System in the Diocese of Parramatta is committed to developing an educational and organisational culture based on mutual trust and respect. We are committed to providing a safe and supportive work and learning environment for all employees and students.

We acknowledge that employees, students and parents may sometimes have a complaint regarding a decision, behaviour, act or omission that they feel is unacceptable. Whilst most issues can be resolved through direct discussion with the parties, there may be instances in which this is not possible.

Scope of the policy

This policy provides a process for those employed by the Catholic Education Office (CEO) and those receiving services from the Catholic Education System to raise a complaint. This includes students, employees, parents, pastors and members of the wider community.

Complaints may relate to any practice or policy of a school or CEO related to the treatment of or education of students. The Parramatta Catholic Education System has some specific complaints processes. The 'Child Protection Kit' has specific policies and procedures to address complaints of child abuse and reportable conduct. 'Maintaining Right Relations Policy and Procedures' addresses complaints of harassment, bullying and discrimination. Nothing in this document replaces the processes outlined in these documents.

Underlying principles

The Parramatta Catholic Education System is committed to the following principles to ensure complaints are addressed appropriately:

- Complaints will be investigated in a fair and impartial manner
- A person facing a complaint is entitled to know detailed information regarding the substance of the complaint and to have the opportunity to respond
- Confidentiality will be observed
- The complaints management process will be conducted in a manner that is respectful of all parties
- Persons making a complaint will not be victimised
- It is expected that complaints are made in good faith and are not vexatious or malicious
- Complaints will be addressed in a timely manner and complainants will be advised if the matter cannot be finalised within one month.

Options available to persons with complaints

Deal with the situation personally

In less serious matters in which there is no risk of harm to any person, it may be preferable to discuss the issue of concern with the relevant person to endeavour to reach an amicable resolution.

Contact the school

A person may feel unable to approach the relevant person directly or not be satisfied with their response. The matter may be more serious in that the complainant believes a person is at risk of harm. In such circumstances, a person may wish to contact the school. An inquiry at the school reception may be the first point of contact for people with complaints. The office staff will take the complaint and refer it to the person designated to deal with the nature of the complaint. This person may be a Coordinator, the Assistant Principal or Principal.

Contact the Catholic Education Office

There may be occasions when a person wishes to take their concern directly to the Catholic Education Office. It may be they are not satisfied with the school's response or other legitimate reasons for not approaching the school directly, such as a conflict of interest.

The Catholic Education Office has a community liaison line for taking general inquiries or concerns. The CEO Officer will take the complaint and refer it to the relevant CEO personnel. In some instances, the CEO Officer may advise that the complaint is more appropriately dealt with at the school level. In general, the CEO Officer will refer the complaint to the Director of System Performance for the school involved.

For matters concerning CEO staff, in the first instance the complaint would be taken to the person's immediate supervisor. If the complaint is not satisfied, they may address their concern to the Director of the relevant department.

Intake process

- All school and Catholic Education Office personnel who are responsible for taking enquiries / complaints will complete a signed and dated 'Intake Form'.
- Record the complaint / enquiry by clearly recording the following information:
 - Contact details of the complainant.
 - Nature of the matter including the details of the complaint (what is the matter, who is involved, when it happened, where it happened, any contextual information) and the resolution that is sought.
 - Any advice provided.
 - Any action taken including the referral of the complaint.
 - Assess how the complaint will be managed

- The intake form is forwarded to the person responsible for assessing how the complaint is to be managed. In schools, this would be the Principal or their delegate. In the Catholic Education Office, in the first instance, it will be the Area Administrator.
- The assessment section of the 'Intake Form' is completed to clarify how the complaint / enquiry will be managed.
- Maintain accurate and confidential records
- The 'Intake Form' is filed in the school / CEO 'Complaints Register'.
- A copy of the Intake Form is forwarded to the person responsible for following-up the complaint / enquiry.
- In cases where an enquiry / investigation into the matter proceeds, a separate file is established or documentation is included in the relevant staff or student file.
- The Intake Form identifies any relevant file that has been established or utilised in relation to the matter.
- When the enquiry is finalised / closed, this is noted on the Intake Form.

Addressing complaints

No further action will be taken when the complainant is satisfied with the explanation given at the time of making the complaint or enquiry except when the complaint refers to matters that must be investigated under Child Protection legislation.

Complaints assessed as relevant to a particular school or CEO procedure will be handled in accordance with the relevant procedure, for example, student management procedures, child protection procedures, Maintaining Right Relations procedures, employee disciplinary procedures.

Complaints that do not relate to a particular school or CEO procedure will be addressed as follows:

- Record the complaint
- Clarify what resolution is sought
- Advise the person/s against whom the complaint has been made of the concern and provide them with the opportunity to respond
- Obtain other relevant information e.g. from witnesses
- Resolve the matter.

Appeal

A person who is not satisfied that the matter has been resolved appropriately, may choose to appeal to the Principal of the school if the Principal has not been involved in investigating or examining the complaint, or is not the person named as the source of the grievance.

Alternatively, an appeal may be made to the Director of System Performance of the relevant school who may be contacted at the Catholic Education Office - phone number (02) 9840 5600.

For Catholic Education Office matters an appeal may be made to the Director of the relevant department.

In the final instance, an appeal may be made to the Executive Director of Schools.

The Overseas Students Ombudsman

If you wish to lodge an external appeal or complain about the decision, you can contact the Overseas Students Ombudsman. The Overseas Students Ombudsman offers a free and independent service for overseas students who have a complaint or want to lodge an external appeal about a decision made by their private education or training provider. See the Overseas Ombudsman website www.oso.gov.au for more information.



Intake Form For Complaints

Confidential

Date:	phone call	email	fax	letter
Name of person making contact:				
Nature of matter:				
Advice / Action:				

Advice provided by:	Date:
Assessment:	
<p>Report to DoCS Helpline / Police</p> <p>Non-reportable matter (EXEMPTION a, b, or c) under Ombudsman's Act 1974 – file est. at CEO</p> <p>Reportable to Ombudsman – file established at CEO</p> <p>Not in jurisdiction of Ombudsman Act – managed by q Principal q Area Administrator</p> <p>Other</p> <p>Matter resolved, no further action required</p>	
Assessment made by:	Date:
Name of associated file:	
<p>Please file this form in the complaints register</p> <p>For complaints received by CEO staff please forward copy to</p> <p>Child Protection Officer</p>	