



'A light beneath our feet'

## ST ANTHONY'S SCHOOL

### DISPUTE AND COMPLAINT RESOLUTION PROCEDURES

Catholic schools can serve as models for all within Western Australia who seek to create genuine communities. Such communities are always founded upon shared commitment to the common good (Mandate, 6).

On occasions there may be a disagreement with a decision and a dispute or complaint may arise within a Catholic school.

The interactions and protocols of Catholic schools emphasise the sacredness of human life and the dignity of the individual. Catholic Education is committed to ensuring that disputes and complaints are dealt with fairly, objectively and in a timely manner, and that processes reflect the principles of participation, co-responsibility and subsidiarity.

St Anthony's School is committed to handling complaints effectively and efficiently. To manage complaints effectively, we have established a Dispute and Complaint Procedure. Our school supports the rights of parents/guardians, students and staff to have their complaints taken seriously, and responded to promptly and thoroughly.

Our complaints management procedure allows us to effectively capture, manage and report on complaints. We commit to regular analysis of complaints received and the implementation of any actions to rectify any deficiencies identified. We commit to making our complaints management procedures accessible and transparent. We will ensure our school community are aware of the school's process for dealing with disputes and complaints.

#### Definitions

*Complaint* means an expression of dissatisfaction with our school services, decisions, actions or those of its staff, or about the complaint management process itself.

*Dispute* means a conflict regarding a right, claim, or demand on one side, met by contrary claims or allegations on the other.

*Procedural Fairness* means that a matter has been resolved to the satisfaction of Catholic Education in Western Australia with respect to the paramount importance of the student(s).

*Students* are defined as children and young people enrolled in schools and early learning and care services.

#### 3. Principles

- All decisions are to reflect the paramount importance of the student(s).
- Any person may make a verbal or written complaint about a matter arising from the operations of the school.
- The person making the complaint is personally responsible and liable for the content of their complaint.
- The complaint should be verifiable; however, if a complaint is anonymous and the principal considers it to be of concern, it should be considered by the principal so that they can determine the appropriate course of action.

- Disputes and complaints are managed in accordance with the Principles of Subsidiarity, requiring that nothing shall be done by a higher authority or level that could be done as well or better than a lower one.
- Disputes and complaints contribute to continuous learning and improvement so that the potential and opportunity for incidents being repeated are minimized.
- Any review of a dispute or complaint will be based on procedural fairness.
- Information in a complaint will only be disclosed to those parties who need to know in order to investigate and resolve the complaint.
- Once a decision has been made, parties may request a review of the decision in accordance with procedures, including escalating the dispute or complaint to the Executive Director of Catholic Education WA.

### Informal complaints resolution

The majority of issues causing concern can be handled quickly and in an informal manner. In most cases these issues can be resolved through informal discussions with appropriate staff member(s).

Our school welcomes suggestions and comments from parents and takes all concerns, disputes and complaints seriously. A concern will be treated as a less serious matter that may be resolved with a more informal approach.

A dispute or complaint will be treated as something that requires the formal process detailed below to be followed.

We encourage all members of our school community to first treat their issue as a concern when approaching the school, and then lodge a formal complaint if this is not handled to their satisfaction. However, in unique circumstances or where a matter involves **an immediate risk to the health, safety or wellbeing of a student**, the matter should be referred directly to the principal.

### Roles and responsibilities of staff in resolving complaints and disputes

School staff and the school leadership are responsible for recording, investigating and resolving complaints and analysing them to identify causes and inform continuous improvement.

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| Staff members       | All staff are authorised to deal with informal complaints. They are to record the resolution of informal matters in SEQTA. Where a person makes a formal complaint, staff must refer them to the complaints officer.   |
| Assistant Principal | The assistant principal is authorized to record, investigate and manage complaints. They are required to maintain accurate records in the complaints register and liaise with parties to a dispute or complaint.   |
| Principal           | The principal is accountable for ensuring that appropriate and relevant procedures are developed, implemented and reviewed on a regular basis and relevant reporting is completed.<br>They are also responsible for ensuring all staff are educated about the school's complaints management procedures, and maintaining accurate records in the school's complaints register. |

### How to make a formal complaint

Where appropriate, and in most instances, the matter should initially be raised directly with the relevant staff member. If that is not appropriate or the issue was not addressed to your satisfaction or you simply wish to make a formal complaint you can do so by any of the following means:

1. Requesting an appointment with either Assistant Principal
2. Write a letter/email to the Principal (admin@sawanneroo.wa.edu.au) or
3. Telephone the school administration and request an appointment to speak with the Principal.

Where a dispute or complaint is about the principal and there is no likelihood that it can be resolved directly with the principal, the immediate parties may refer the dispute or complaint to the Executive Director of Catholic Education Western Australia Limited (CEWA Ltd).

### **Anonymous complaints**

It is preferable that the complaint is verifiable; however, if a complaint or any other information of unknown origin (i.e. anonymous) provides information that would cause the principal concern, it should be considered by the principal so that they can determine the appropriate course of action.

The dispute or complaint shall be promptly acknowledged in writing, unless the complainant is anonymous and cannot be identified.

The parties to the dispute or complaint shall be notified of the finding(s) of the dispute or complaint, including the basis of the finding(s). There is no duty to notify an anonymous complainant.

### **Withdrawal of a complaint**

Anyone may withdraw a complaint or dispute at any stage of the resolution process. If a complaint is withdrawn, the matter is deemed to be closed, unless we, at our discretion and in all the circumstances, wish to continue to address a matter raised.

### **Internal formal resolution procedure**

#### **Step 1 – Receiving and recording the complaint**

All formal complaints are logged through SEQTA by the person in receipt of the complaint

#### **Step 2 – Acknowledge the complaint**

All complaints will be acknowledged in writing at the time of receipt or as soon as possible afterwards.

#### **Step 3 – Assess the complaint and address immediate risks**

An investigation will be conducted into the issues raised, following the principles of procedural fairness, and a determination made.

Where there is an appropriate:

- CEWA Ltd policy or directive that provides a specific mechanism for addressing the dispute or complaint; or
- binding legislative or regulator mechanism (including an Enterprise Bargaining Agreement) that addresses the issue raised in the dispute or complaint,

will be followed.

Parties may involve a support person(s) to assist them in resolving the dispute or complaint.

#### **Step 4 – Resolving complaints**

Following the determination, if appropriate, a resolution will be formulated and meeting with the complainant or a written response provided to the complainant. The matter will be closed if this response is accepted.

### **Step 5 – Further investigation**

If the proposed outcome is not accepted, the matter will be reviewed internally by the principal or the principal's delegate, who may seek additional information or submissions from the relevant parties. The principal or their delegate will seek to resolve all disputes within 14 days from the date that the review process is initiated.

The principal may request external assistance and expertise (including mediation), including the involvement of the CEWA Ltd Employment and Community Relations Team to assist in the resolution of a dispute or complaint.

The matter will be closed if the response of the principal, or their delegate, is accepted.

### **Step 6 – Continuous improvement**

All complaints received will be entered into the school's complaints register and, where appropriate, a corrective action request will be made to address any underlying processes which the complaints investigation revealed may require improvement.

### **Step 7 – External resolution**

If the matter remains unresolved, the parties may seek external resolution alternatives – see **Reviews and appeals**.

## **Reviews and appeals**

Should a complainant be dissatisfied with the outcome of an informal complaint with the involvement of the immediate parties, or if there are unique circumstances, the matter can be referred to the next level by the complainant.

Once a decision has been made, parties may request a review of the decision in accordance with Procedures, including escalating the dispute or complaint to the Executive Director of CEWA Ltd. The Executive Director will investigate the complaint and/or areas of disputation in accordance with the rules of procedural fairness.

### *The role of the Director General*

The Director General of the Department of Education is responsible for ensuring that the school observes the registration standards, including the standard about its disputes and complaints management system. Any student, parent or community member is entitled to contact the Director General with concerns about how the school has dealt with a complaint. Information is available on the Department of Education website. While the Director General may consider whether the school has breached the registration standards, the Director General does not have power to intervene in a complaint or override the school's decision.

## **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality applies with respect to both information relating to the person making the complaint, and if relevant, to a person against whom a complaint is made. Our school is committed to maintaining the confidentiality of information throughout the complaints process.

Personally identifiable information about a complainant will only be made available for the purpose of addressing the complaint and (unless the complainant consents) will be actively protected from disclosure.

Children and young people have the same right to privacy, anonymity and confidentiality as adults. Children and young people may waive their right to privacy and confidentiality if they decide to involve somebody else in the complaints process, e.g. to access support.

If a complainant chooses to make a complaint without disclosing their identity, this will limit the options for proper and thorough investigation and resolution. It also raises issues in relation of procedural fairness for those who have a complaint made against them as they have the right to know of the particulars of the complaint and to respond. The school therefore cannot guarantee that anonymous complaints can or will be dealt with as effectively. Complainants are always encouraged to identify themselves.

As far as possible and appropriate, due discretion will be respected and maintained by all parties throughout the resolution process, save where persons are required to be informed on a 'need to know' basis or where investigative, statutory or legal requirements stipulate that matters be disclosed, reported or discussed. Therefore, there can be no overriding legal obligation or right with respect to confidentiality.

Where complaints are made in circumstances where an alleged crime may have been committed or the matter falls under the *CEWA Child Protection Procedures* or the WA Police, CEWA Ltd will be contacted and formally advised.

### **Record keeping**

The principal shall maintain appropriate records of the relevant particulars used to make a decision in response to any formal dispute or complaint. Where applicable this will include any statements made by the parties involved.

### **Child friendly complaints**

The principles that apply to complaints also are applied to complaints and concerns raised by students. We are committed to improving the visibility, accessibility and responsiveness of the complaints process for our students.

Students are encouraged to report complaints by:

- Talking to someone in the school they feel comfortable with, whether it is a mentor, classroom teacher, a member of the support staff or the school's social worker

Students can make a complaint in different ways:

- Face to face
- By telephone (9303 7500)
- In writing (letter, email, or school website) ([admin@sawanneroo.wa.edu.au](mailto:admin@sawanneroo.wa.edu.au))

Complaints should be acknowledged at the time of receipt or as soon as possible afterwards. Children and young people are often wary about making a complaint and want to be assured they are being listened to straight away.

Complaints that appear trivial still need to be handled seriously. Young people may test the complaints procedures on relatively minor issues before finding the confidence to raise something painful such as bullying.

If the issue is a painful one, or if exploration of it is taking time, a student may need support from another student or from an adult. Our students are encouraged to choose a person with whom they feel comfortable to provide support.

**In circumstances involving an allegation or complaint in relation to grooming, child abuse and breaches of the Code of Conduct the school will follow the *CEWA Child Protection Procedures (Mandatory Reporting)*, and the matter is reported promptly to the responsible government authorities.**

**Flowchart for Dealing with Disputes and Complaints**

