



GRIEVANCE AND COMPLAINTS POLICY

Rationale

At Aquinas College, we are committed to building a school culture that features positive and respectful relationships. As a Catholic school, these relationships are grounded in the values of the gospel, in particular the values of justice, compassion, reconciliation, truth and love. In keeping with Catholic social teaching, a respect for the innate dignity of each person shapes all our relationships.

We acknowledge, however, that staff, parents and students can sometimes feel aggrieved about something that is happening at the College which appears to be discriminatory or to contravene the College Mission Statement. Such contraventions include:

- excluding someone from activities
- giving someone the majority of unpleasant tasks
- verbal abuse
- humiliating someone through sarcasm or insults
- intimidation

All members of the Aquinas College community are expected to treat each other with dignity and respect.

Aim

This policy outlines our principles and procedures for receiving and resolving complaints. It ought to be read in conjunction with related policies and core documents of the College, namely:

- Restorative Practices Policy
- Safe and Sound Practice Guidelines (Occupational Violence).
- Respectful Relationships Policy
- A Safe School Policy
- A Duty of Care Policy
- Pastoral Care Policy

Implementation

COMPLAINTS RESOLUTION: GUIDING PRINCIPLES

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

- We will work with the complainant with respect, courtesy and openness and with a genuine desire to achieve fair and reasonable decisions.
- The complaint will be resolved as quickly as possible.
- Confidentiality, impartiality and the principles of natural justice will form the basis of our complaints resolution process.
- The person(s) facing the complaint will be provided with information about the substance of the complaint and will have the opportunity to respond.

- Personal information disclosed will be treated as confidential.
- Our resolution process will be grounded in sound and fair procedures for information sharing, conciliation, investigation and decision making.
- If a satisfactory outcome cannot be achieved, the College will provide the complainant with options for having the decision reviewed or mediated via an external authority.
- The communal needs of the College community will in most instances exceed the needs of any individual.

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 as a complainant you are a parent, and your concern/complaint relates to your child's treatment by another student or students while at school, the College expects that you will refer your complaint directly to the College, via your child's class teacher, Homeroom or Year Level Leader. Under no circumstances should you approach another student while in the care of the College to discuss the issue or chastise him or her. Direct contact with parents to resolve the matter is also discouraged if the complaint pertains to issues or incidents that have arisen at the College.

PROCEDURES

Taking direct personal action

You may feel that you can speak with the person/s involved regarding the impact the situation is having on yourself. This may be the quickest and easiest way to resolve the matter. Prior to this you may wish to speak with a trusted person e.g.

- in the case of a student - teacher, parent or counsellor,
- in the case of a parent - partner, Year Level Leader or a member of the counselling team (YFC)
- in the case of a staff member – Line manager, Head of Staff, member of the College Executive, a member of the counselling team (YFC) or colleague.

Key Referral People

Complainants are encouraged to make contact with members of the College staff who are most closely connected with the complaint/concern. For parents, this might be your child's Homeroom teacher or Mentor, Year Level Leader, Head of School, Deputy Principal – Students or the College Principal. If the complaint is against the College Principal, this may be the President of the Association of Canonical Administrators.

Email Communications and Teaching Staff

Due to teachers' classroom and supervision duties, a complainant's first contact is best made by email, with an appointment request for either a phone conference or face-to-face meeting.

Complainants are asked to outline concerns or issues (e.g. learning program, discipline, student/peer incidents) so that the staff member can prepare for the meeting/phone conference. Complainants 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.

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 President of the Association of Canonical Administrator, Principal or a senior member of staff will:

- organise a meeting/phone conference
- fully document the complaint, any actions taken to resolve it and the outcomes of those actions
- further and fully investigate the matter
- ensure that no one is victimised as a result of a complaint being made
- if necessary, enable a complainant to be accompanied by another person of his/her choice as a support person
- enable the person against whom the complaint has been made to respond, and to be accompanied to any meeting by another person of his/her choice as a support person
- organise a process of mediation if a complaint cannot be satisfactorily resolved by the College.

Role of the support person

The role of a support person is to be a positive presence for the person bringing the grievance. The support person may take notes or just listen; occasionally they may speak to the person bringing the grievance to help them clarify what they are saying. The support person does not speak on behalf of the person bringing the grievance - it is important for the person hearing the grievance that they hear it directly from the person bringing the grievance. The support person is able to speak with the person bringing the grievance outside of the meeting and to be in a position to really help with clarifying exactly what was said in the meeting.

Outcomes

Outcomes to resolve a grievance can include the following:

- Apology - either written or verbal
- Mediation - with an internal or external mediator
- Official warning
- Counselling or dismissal
- Disciplinary action
- Behaviour Contract (in the case of students)
- Pastoral/spiritual care
- An understanding that the behaviour will not be repeated

Serious or Repeated Complaints or Allegations of Misconduct

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

Avenues of Appeal

Upon receiving an appeal the College Principal will examine all documentation related to the grievance and may seek further interviews.

Advice may be sought from the President of the Association of Canonical Administrators. The outcome of an appeal is to either uphold the original investigation or to reopen the investigation appointing a new investigator.

External agency

If you are not happy with the way a grievance has been dealt with you may wish to go to an external agency for further advice and assistance. Other external agencies you may consider are:

Senior Officer

Professional Conduct, Ethics & Investigations

Catholic Education Melbourne

PO Box 3

East Melbourne VIC 3002

9267 0228

The Equal Opportunity Commission of Victoria

Level 3, 380 Lonsdale Street

Melbourne VIC 3000

9281 7111 or 1800 134 142

Fair Work Commission

Level 4, 11 Exhibition Street

Melbourne VIC. 3000

8661 7777