

VISION STATEMENT

We strive to create a school that truly equips young people for their engagement with the world and the challenges of this century, by fostering an attitude of learning with purpose and joy.

VALUES

Our values guide how we respond to concerns and complaints:

- **Truth** – We are open, honest and transparent.
- **Courage** – We speak up, even when it's difficult.
- **Responsibility** – We act promptly to protect children and do what is right.
- **Growth** – We learn from every concern raised to improve our school and child safety culture.

PURPOSE

This policy outlines how Sophia Mundi Steiner School manages complaints, grievances and child safety-related concerns. It ensures that all complaints are handled fairly, promptly, respectfully, and always with a focus on student wellbeing and child safety.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Everyone has the right to be heard and treated with dignity and respect.
- Complaints are handled in line with the principles of natural justice and procedural fairness.
- All complaints will be managed without fear of victimisation or reprisal.
- We prioritise child safety and will act immediately on any concerns relating to abuse or harm.
- We aim for open communication and early, informal resolution wherever possible, with a preference for a restorative approach.
- Complaints are managed confidentially, and information is shared only on a need-to-know basis.
- We use complaints to reflect, learn, and improve. The school will endeavour to respond to both the specific and (where applicable) the systemic issues raised by the complaint.

When addressing a complaint, it is expected that all parties will:

- Actively listen to one another, be considerate of each other's views, and respect each other's role
- Be resolution focused and attempt to preserve relationships
- Act co-operatively and in good faith
- Behave with respect and courtesy
- Be inclusive, considerate, and respect the cultural safety of all people, including Aboriginal people, and the human rights of all parties including but not limited to disability, age, race, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, and marital status
- Consider communication needs and preferences
- Ensure that complainants and students related to complainants are not victimised for making a complaint or asserting their rights

- Respect the privacy and confidentiality of those involved unless permitted or required to share information by law
- Operate within and seek reasonable resolutions that comply with all applicable legislation and department policies.

CHILD-FOCUSED AND CULTURALLY SAFE APPROACH

Sophia Mundi is committed to:

- Listening to children and taking their concerns seriously.
- Ensuring accessible, simple and safe complaint pathways for students.
- Providing information and support in culturally appropriate ways, including through interpreters.
- Maintaining a restorative, trauma-informed and fair process for all involved.
- Consulting with Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and other communities to ensure cultural safety.

SCOPE

This policy applies to complaints raised by:

- Students or former students
- Parents, carers, and families
- Staff, volunteers and contractors (please also see the internal Complaints & Grievances Policy for work related complaints)
- Community members and external stakeholders

It includes complaints about:

- Breaches of the Child Safety Code of Conduct
- Student learning
- Student wellbeing, including bullying and cyberbullying
- Staff or volunteer behaviour or decisions
- School services, policies, or administration
- The school's response to a child safety incident or concern
- Child abuse, harm, or safety concerns

KEY DEFINITIONS

Complaint: *A concern or expression of dissatisfaction about an action, decision, or service provided by the school, or a failure to act.*

Child Safety-Related Complaint – *Any disclosure, concern, suspicion, or allegation about:*

- *Child abuse or harm*
- *Breaches of the Child Safety Code of Conduct*
- *[Reportable Conduct](#) or staff misconduct*
- *Concerns about how the School has managed a child safety matter*

Complainant: *The person raising the concern.*

Respondent: *The person or area the complaint is about.*

Responsible Person: *The staff member or leader managing the complaint.*

Resolution: *An agreed or reasonable outcome that addresses the concern.*

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

All staff

- Listen respectfully to concerns and seek to resolve issues early.
- Immediately report any child-safety-related complaints to a Child Protection Officer or the Principal.
- Follow the School's internal and external reporting requirements.
- Never make a judgment about the truth of a complaint.

Child Protection Officers

- Support staff to understand their reporting obligations.
- Assist in managing, investigating, and responding to child safety-related complaints.
- Monitor compliance with this policy.

Principal

- Oversees the management of all complaints, other than complaints relating to the principal.
- Ensures fair handling, record keeping, and compliance, including retaining a register of formal complaints (listing the date, subject and resolution) for reporting to the governing board on an annual basis and to be available to the VRQA as required.
- Reports serious, unresolved, or child-safety-related matters to the Board and/or relevant authorities.

Board of Directors

- Handles complaints concerning the Principal or complex matters that have been escalated.
- Responds to appeals lodged in relation to an unresolved formal complaint.
- Reviews trends and outcomes for continuous improvement.

CHILD SAFETY COMPLAINTS

A child safety-related complaint includes any disclosure, allegation, suspicion, concern or internal report of:

- Allegations or risks of child abuse or harm occurring at or connected to the School
- Breaches of the Child Safety Code of Conduct
- Concerns about how the School has managed a child safety incident
- Reports of procedural or legislative non-compliance
- A child safety incident or concern alleged to have occurred, be occurring, or be at risk of occurring at the School or a School event
- Reportable Conduct as defined in the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)
- Abuse, grooming or other harm of a current or former student by:
 - a current or former staff member
 - a current or former student
 - another person (for example, parent, volunteer, sibling, contractor or visitor), while on School premises or at a School event
- Other staff or volunteer misconduct (such as a procedural breach of the Child Safety Program)

MAKING A CHILD SAFETY COMPLAINT:

Anyone, including students, parents, staff, or community members, can make a child safety-related complaint to:

- The Principal (Senior Child Safety Officer)
- A Child Protection Officer
- Any trusted staff member

Complaints may be made in person, by phone, by email, or in writing, or via the Student Voice Box in the Library. Students may also disclose a concern verbally or in writing or drawing, through class work or artworks.

If the complaint concerns the Principal, the complaint should be directed to the Assistant Principal (Secondary) and the Board of Directors.

RESPONDING TO A CHILD SAFETY COMPLAINT

When a child safety concern is raised, the School will:

1. Listen and Support

- The staff member receiving the concern will listen carefully, thank the person for speaking up, and ensure they feel supported and safe.
- The concern will be treated confidentially and recorded clearly.

2. Report Internally

- The staff member must immediately report the concern to the **Principal or Child Protection Officer**.
- The Principal will assess the concern and determine whether immediate protective action is required.
- If the complaint involves the Principal, the Board of Directors will take responsibility for managing the process, supported by the Assistant Principal.

3. Report to External Authorities (as required)

Depending on the concern, the following agencies may be contacted:

- **Victoria Police** – for any allegation of criminal conduct.
- Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (Child Protection) – if a child is at risk of significant harm.
- Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) – for teacher misconduct.
- Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP) – for reportable conduct matters.
- **VRQA** – for school regulatory matters.

Reports will be made whether or not there is a legal obligation to do so.

4. Protect the Child or Student

- Immediate safety measures will be put in place for any child affected.
- The School will ensure the student has access to counselling, wellbeing support, and a trusted staff contact.

- Where the complaint relates to a sexual offence or sexual misconduct that occurred before 1 July 2018, complainants will be informed about the [National Redress Scheme](#) for people who have experienced institutional child sexual abuse.

5. Investigate and Respond

- The Principal or delegated investigator will assess and respond promptly.
- The process will be transparent, impartial, and respectful of all involved.
- The complainant will be kept informed of progress and outcomes.

6. Follow-Up and Continuous Improvement

- The School will reflect on the circumstances of the complaint to identify and implement improvements.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND RECORD KEEPING

- All complaints are recorded in the **Child Safety Complaints Register**.
- Records include what happened, actions taken, and outcomes.
- Access is restricted to authorised personnel only.
- Records are maintained in accordance with privacy, child safety, and employment law obligations.
- Records of child safety complaints are kept separate from general complaints files.

HOW TO RAISE A GENERAL CONCERN OR COMPLAINT

For Students

Sophia Mundi acknowledges that issues or concerns can cause stress or worry for students and impact their wellbeing and learning. We encourage our students to raise issues or concerns as they arise so that we can work together to resolve them.

Students are encouraged to raise any issue or concern with:

- A trusted teacher, Class Guardian, or support staff member.
- The Wellbeing Coordinator
- Assistant Principal or Principal
- Through the Student Voice Box located in the Library (can be anonymous).

Students may also disclose a concern verbally or in writing or drawing, through class work or artworks.

Students may also ask a parent, carer, or trusted adult to speak on their behalf, or have a trusted person with them when making a complaint. Concerns may be raised verbally or in writing.

All student complaints will be taken seriously, managed sensitively, and appropriate support will be provided.

Further information and resources to support students to raise issues or concerns are available at:

- [Kids Helpline](#) (call 1800 55 1800)
- [Headspace](#)
- [Reach Out](#)
- [Report Racism Hotline](#) (call 1800 722 476) – this hotline enables students to report concerns relating to racism or religious discrimination
- [Victorian Aboriginal Education Association](#) (VAEAI)

For Parents, Carers and Community Members

Step 1 – Informal resolution

Raise the issue directly with the most relevant person (for example, the Class Teacher or Guardian, subject teacher, or relevant staff member).

Many issues can be resolved quickly through respectful discussion.

If additional support is required, discuss your concerns with the Assistant Principal. A meeting will be scheduled to work through your concerns and determine the appropriate approach to address them.

If further support is required, reach out to the Principal.

A meeting will be arranged with the Principal and other relevant parties to discuss your concerns and proposed approach, with the objective of reaching a resolution satisfactory to all parties.

If after the meeting we are unable to resolve the concerns together, we will produce a written summary of what has taken place so far, acknowledging the requests you have made, and providing reasons as to why the school will not be acting on those requests.

Step 2 - Formal complaint

If informal steps do not resolve the issue, you may make a formal written complaint to the Principal. Where the complaint concerns the Principal, the complaint should be directed to the Board. Complaints can be made in person, over the phone, by email or in writing. Anonymous complaints can be sent by mail or lodged in the Student Voice Box in the Library.

Please include:

- A clear description of the issue
- Any relevant documents or evidence
- What outcome you are seeking

If the complaint is made in person or over the phone, the Principal/Board will ensure that a written account of your complaint is documented, to be reviewed by the complainant to ensure it accurately reflects the complaint being made.

You are welcome to have a support person to assist you in raising a complaint or concern with our school. Please advise us if you wish to have a support person to assist you, and provide their name, contact details, and their relationship to you.

Step 3 – Response

The school will:

1. Acknowledge your complaint within 2 school days (unless it is an anonymous complaint)
2. Investigate and seek to resolve it within 15 school days.
3. Keep you informed of progress, especially for complex matters.

If more time is required, you will be notified, and interim support measures may be put in place.

Depending on the issues raised in the complaint, the Responsible Person may need to gather further information to properly understand the situation. This process may also involve speaking to staff to obtain details about the situation or the concerns raised.

In some instances, the leadership team may reach out to subject matter experts for expert advice.

The school may also reach out to the complainant for further information or to clarify concerns.

Step 4 – Resolution

Where possible and appropriate a resolution meeting will be arranged with the Principal and/or other relevant parties to discuss the complaint and proposed outcomes, with the objective of reaching a resolution satisfactory to all parties.

If after the resolution meeting we are unable to resolve the complaint together, we will produce a written summary of the complaint and the further action that has been requested.

In some circumstances, the Principal may determine that a resolution meeting would not be appropriate. In this situation, a response to the complaint will be provided in writing.

Resolution may include:

- An apology or explanation
- A review or change of decision
- Policy or procedure review which may result in a change in policy or practice
- Mediation, conciliation or facilitated conversation
- Counselling or support for affected students
- Actions to improve communication or understanding
- Training or support for staff or students
- Reporting to external authorities
- Disciplinary action proposed or taken where necessary

If the complainant accepts the school's response, the matter is noted as "resolved" and closed.

The School regularly reviews feedback and complaints to identify improvements to policy, training, or practice. The Board of Directors will oversee reviews of significant or systemic issues.

Step 5 - Review or external referral

Complainants, or other persons who are involved in the matter (for example, a staff member whose behaviour is the subject of the complaint, a student who is the victim of the alleged behaviour or their parent/carer) who are not satisfied with the management of a complaint or its outcome may request an internal review of:

- Procedures undertaken
- Findings made
- Disciplinary actions proposed or taken
- Other outcomes (including a decision not to make a finding or to take disciplinary or other action).

Requests for internal reviews should be made to the Principal or the Board of Directors. Steps 3 and 4 will be undertaken again. An Independent expert may be brought in to support this process if appropriate.

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of this review, contact the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) or Victorian Ombudsman, depending on the issue.

For Exchange Students

If an overseas student is not satisfied with the outcome of the School's internal complaints handling process, they may lodge an external appeal through the Overseas Students Ombudsman (OSO) which investigates complaints about problems that overseas students or intending overseas students may have with private education and training in Australia.

The services of the OSO are free.

The School agrees to be bound by the OSO's recommendations and will ensure that any recommendations made are implemented within 30 days of receipt of the report.

RECORD KEEPING

- All formal complaints are documented and securely stored.
- Records include the nature of the complaint, steps taken, and the outcome.
- Child safety-related complaints are recorded separately under the Child Safety Record Keeping Policy and the Child Safety Complaints Register.
- Access to records is restricted to authorised personnel only.
- Records are kept in accordance with privacy, employment, and child safety legislation.
- The Principal reviews complaint trends regularly and reports annually to the Board.

COMMUNICATION

This policy and procedure are available:

- On the school website
- In staff and student induction materials
- In parent handbooks and information sessions
- From the school office on request

Child-friendly versions are also available for primary and secondary students.

RELATED POLICIES

- Child Safety Policy
- Child Safety Code of Conduct
- Response & Reporting Obligations
- Support following incident or disclosure
- School Wellbeing Policy
- Behaviour Management Policy
- Privacy and Records Management Policies
- Whistleblower Policy

REVIEW

The School will monitor and review this policy regularly to assess its effectiveness in encouraging the reporting of reportable conduct, protection of persons making reports, and investigation of reports.

This policy will be reviewed every two years or earlier if required by changes to legislation or the Victorian Child Safe Standards.

KEY CONTACTS AND REFERENCES

Sophia Mundi

Principal: principal@sophiamundi.vic.edu.au

Board: board@sophiamundi.vic.edu.au

Business Manager: business.manager@sophiamundi.vic.edu.au

Post: PO Box 184, Abbotsford, VIC, 3067

External

National Office for Child Safety: www.childsafety.gov.au/resources/complaint-handling-guide-upholding-rights-children-and-young-people

Commission for Children and Young People: CCYP | Including children and young people in reportable conduct investigations

VRQA: Make a complaint | vrqa.vic.gov.au

Victorian Ombudsman: Home | Victorian Ombudsman

Victorian Institute of Teaching: Complaints about a teacher | Victorian Institute of Teaching

Child Protection: Child protection - DFFH Services

Reportable and Notifiable Conduct: Reportable and Notifiable Conduct: Policy | VIC.GOV.AU | Policy and Advisory Library

International students: International student complaints | Commonwealth Ombudsman

- Email: ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au
- Call: 1300 362 072 within Australia. Outside Australia call +61 2 5117 3600.
- Enquiries: 10:00am to 4:00pm Monday to Friday, Australian Eastern Standard Time (Australian Eastern Daylight Time when daylight savings is in effect)
- Postal: Commonwealth Ombudsman, GPO Box 442 Canberra ACT 2601.