1 The Nature of Complaints

There are essentially four areas of complaints: parents (and guardians), students, the public and staff. This document deals mainly with procedures for parents and students. The procedure for staff complaints is found on pages 13 – 15.

The Education Act 1999 has, as a condition of registration and re-registration, a requirement that a school has a dispute resolution procedure.

While parents will often wish to raise issues on behalf of their children, there are other issues which students may choose to raise on their own behalf and which are best raised by them.

Complaints from members of the public will be treated in a similar way to complaints from parents, although most complaints from the public would be referred directly to the Principal or a senior member of staff.

2 What constitutes a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem.

A complaint may be made if a parent thinks that the school has, for example:

- done something wrong;
- failed to do something it should have done; or
- acted unfairly or impolitely.

A complaint may be made about the school as a whole, a specific department in the school, an individual member of staff, or another member of the school community.

All complaints need to be handled seriously.

3 Key principles for the handling of complaints

- the school is open to the concerns of parents and students;
- complaints are received in a positive manner;
- parents and students can expect to be taken seriously and can approach any member of staff about their concerns;
- concerns are dealt with as speedily as possible and those who have raised them are kept informed about progress;
- it is not acceptable for students to receive adverse treatment because they or their parents have raised a complaint;
- confidentiality is respected and maintained so far as is possible;
• clear confidential files and a record are kept;
• resolution of the matter is sought;
• communication from the school is clear and unambiguous;
• staff are trained in the handling of complaints.

4 Parental Complaints

An Open Organisation: Climate and Culture
Problems are likely to arise if parents feel that the school is not open to their concerns. It is better to have a direct complaint to a member of staff than to have parents sharing their dissatisfaction with others. Parents like to feel valued and involved with the school and they are encouraged to voice their concerns.

An effective complaints procedure can diffuse problems and can provide the school with helpful information. Complaints treated as constructive suggestions can be used to improve standards and may prevent cause for further complaint. Even an unjustified complaint may indicate an area that can be improved.

4.1 Lines of Approach

St Mary's has a clear protocol for dealing with a complaint. All members of staff are encouraged to deal with parental concerns that lie within their area of responsibility and parents are encouraged to direct their initial concerns to the staff member involved.

If approached about a matter that lies outside their area, staff should refer it to a member of the School Executive.

Matters incapable of resolution at a particular level are referred to the appropriate senior person, with parents kept informed of the action being taken.

The School Executive recognises when issues need to go straight to the Principal, with whom the responsibility for most complaints lies.

If parents wish to go straight to the Principal with their concerns, this should be respected. However, it should be explained that the Principal might not be able to respond until she has consulted appropriate staff. Parents may also be encouraged to approach the appropriate staff member, Head of Department or Senior Staff member in the first instance.

Written responses to complaints should always be discussed with and approved by the Principal.

Serious complaints are shared with the Chairman of the School Board by the Principal. There may be certain circumstances, such as complaints about the Principal, when the parents need to direct their complaint in writing to the Chairman. This should be marked “confidential” and addressed to: The Chairman of the Board of Governors, St Mary's Anglican Girls' School, PO Box 105, Karrinyup WA 6921.

Should there be any complaint about a Board member, this must be addressed in writing and directed to the Chairman of the Board of Governors, marked “confidential” and posted as above to the school address. Complaints about the Chairman may be addressed to The Visitor and sent to the Anglican Church, Diocese of Perth, GPO Box W2067, Perth WA 6846.
4.2 Recording

The school keeps an effective record of complaints and other significant parental concerns because:

- it may become the cause of future legal action;
- patterns in the record may indicate a need for action;
- the Principal should be able to check the record if necessary.

The record should contain the following information:

- date the issue was raised;
- name of parent (or guardian);
- name of student;
- brief statement of issue;
- member of staff handling the issue; and
- brief statement of outcome, including closure date and date of last correspondence.

4.3 Confidentiality

Confidentiality is an important issue for students, parents and staff. It is essential that any complaint is treated in a confidential manner and with respect.

Parents often seek an assurance of confidentiality before expressing their concerns. If, for example, they wish to discuss a particular member of staff, they may fear that their child will suffer in some way because they have complained.

The school’s policy requires that complaints made by parents will not rebound adversely on their children and similarly that complaints raised by students will not rebound on them or on other students.

The question of confidentiality should be discussed sensitively and on an individual basis with the parents and the school’s policy should be carefully explained.

If there is a situation involving the police, the Principal or next most senior staff member (if the Principal is unavailable), will take responsibility for action in the school and the Chairman of the school Board will be informed as soon as possible. If this is a Critical Incident, the Principal will also advise the DES.

4.4 Anonymous Complaints

Anonymous complaints may be where there is no indication of either name or address, or where the complainant says that they do not wish to be identified. Anonymous complaints may come from members of the public, from parents or from students.

Complaints from the public about the behaviour of a group of students will be dealt with on a general basis, with reminders to all students about the school’s expectations.

Parents and students are encouraged to give their names and are given reassurance on the issue of confidentiality. If they persist in wishing to remain anonymous, it is at the Principal’s discretion as to what action, if any, will be taken, depending on the nature of the complaint.
4.5 Resolution

Sometimes the very acknowledgement of an issue by the school brings relief and resolution for parents. Satisfaction for a complainant may come from any of the following:

- knowing that changes have been made, and that matters will be different in future;
- knowing that the school is now alerted to a possible problem;
- feeling that their concern has been considered seriously;
- an outcome which may be different from the one they sought, but which they perceive to be well-considered;
- a considered letter;
- an apology.

4.6 Intractable Complaints

There may be a small minority of persistent or aggressive complainants who will never be satisfied, whatever the school does. The school may even discover on investigation that the complaint was without foundation or motivated by malice. Nevertheless, it is wise to treat all complaints seriously and to follow the procedures.

Most complaints can be resolved if approached positively. If a complaint becomes intractable, it may be due to its nature or to the way in which it was handled, or possibly because the parent perceives the school to have ‘closed ranks’ against him or her.

A complaint is considered to be intractable if the parents have appealed to the Principal and are still not satisfied with the response.

- Referral to the Chairman of the School Board
  The Principal will refer the matter to the Chairman of the School Board and inform the parents that this stage has been reached. However, a situation may arise where the complaint seems to the parent, to have been mishandled by the Principal. In those circumstances, the parent should write directly to the Chairman.

  The Chairman will discuss the matter fully with the Principal and be provided with relevant documentation. If a briefing is required from a member of staff, this should occur in the presence of the Principal.

  The Chairman will respond to the parents, notifying them that he is reviewing the matter, asking them if they wish to add anything further and providing a date by which they may expect a response.

  The Chairman may be able to offer a new approach to the matter, and this may satisfy the parents. The Chairman’s response should be clear and offer a meeting if the parents remain troubled.

- Meeting with the Chairman of the School Board
  If a meeting is requested, the Chairman will offer to meet the parents at a time convenient to them.
Parents are permitted to bring with them a supportive friend who is not involved with the complaint.

The Chairman, will listen to and question the parents and the Principal, in the hope that a solution can be found. On rare occasions, this may not be possible.

As part of the induction, new staff will be made aware of the Complaints Policy and its implementation.

See Appendix A (page 6)

5 Students’ Complaints

The principles that apply to parental complaints should also be applied to complaints and concerns from students.

There are, however, differences in approaches. One important difference from the handling of parental complaints is that students should be able to raise concerns with any member of staff with whom they feel comfortable, whether it is the class or Link teacher, a counsellor, a member of the senior staff, or the Principal.

In more complex situations, once the matter is resolved, the outcome will be discussed with the student by a member of staff. To make sure that it is fully understood, a written record may be shared.

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. Students are encouraged to choose a person with whom they feel comfortable to provide support.

Complaints, and ways of dealing with them, also need to be explained to students. This is covered in the Health Education programme, formally and informally.

See Appendix B (page 9)

6 International Students

A separate Complaints Policy has been written for international students in order to meet government regulations. See the International Students Policy on the school’s website.
ISSUES OF CONCERN
Information for Parents

St Mary’s Anglican Girls’ School welcomes suggestions and comments from parents and takes seriously complaints and concerns that may be raised.

A complaint will be treated as an expression of genuine dissatisfaction that needs a response.

What constitutes a complaint?
A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem.

A complaint may be made if a parent thinks that the school has, for example:

- done something wrong;
- failed to do something it should have done; or
- acted unfairly or impolitely.

A complaint may be made about the school as a whole, a specific department in the school, an individual member of staff, or another member of the school community.

All complaints will to be handled seriously.

We wish to ensure that
- parents wishing to make a complaint know how to do so;
- parents realise that we listen to and take complaints seriously;
- we respond to complaints within a reasonable time and in a courteous and efficient way;
- we take action where appropriate.

“How should I complain?”
Members of staff will be happy to help. It may be best to start with the person most closely concerned with the issue – for example, matters referring to the Year 6 class should be raised with the Year 6 teacher, concerns about House matters with the Head of House, sports concerns with the Head of Physical Education, etc. They may be able to sort things out quickly, with the minimum of fuss. However, you may prefer to take the matter to a more senior member of staff, for example a Head of Junior School, one of the Deans, Deputy Principal, or the Principal.

“I don’t want to complain as such, but there is something bothering me”
The school is here for you and your child, and we want to hear your views and your ideas. Contact a member of staff, as described above.

“I am not sure whether to complain or not”
If as parents you have concerns, you are entitled to raise them. If in doubt, you should contact the school, as we are here to help.

“What will happen next?”
If you raise something face-to-face or by telephone, it may be possible to resolve the matter immediately and to your satisfaction.

If you have made a complaint or suggestion in writing, we will contact you within a week, to respond to your concerns and explain how we propose to proceed.
In many circumstances, the person you contact will need to discuss the matter with a colleague and consider it further before responding. You will be given a date by which time you will receive a response. If a detailed exploration of the issue is needed, a further meeting will be required to explain the conclusion, the reasoning for it, and any action taken or proposed.

“What happens about confidentiality?”
Your complaint or concern will be treated in a confidential manner and with respect. Knowledge of it will be limited to the Principal and those directly involved. The Chairman of the School Board may also need to be informed. It is the school’s policy that complaints made by parents should not rebound adversely on their child (ren).

We cannot entirely rule out the need to make third parties outside the school aware of the complaint and possibly also the identity of those involved. This would only be likely to happen where, for example, a child’s safety was at risk or it became necessary to refer matters to the police. You would be fully informed.

While information relating to specific complaints will be kept confidentially on file, we would point out that anonymous complaints might not be pursued.

Action, which may need to be taken under staff disciplinary procedures as a result of a complaint, would be handled confidentially within the school.

“What if I am not satisfied with the outcome?”
We hope that you will feel satisfied with the outcome, or at least that your concerns have been fully and fairly considered.

Should this not be the case, the Principal will offer to refer the matter to the Chairman of the School Board. Alternatively, you may wish to write directly to the Chairman via the school. This should be marked “confidential” and addressed to: The Chairman of the Board of Governors, St Mary’s Anglican Girls’ School, PO Box 105, Karrinyup, WA, 6921.

The Chairman will call for a full report from the Principal, and will examine matters thoroughly before responding. A positive solution will hopefully be achieved, but if it does not, the Chairman will invite you to a meeting. You may wish to be supported by a friend, but legal representation would not be appropriate at this stage.

The school recognises and acknowledges your entitlement to express your concern and we hope to work with you in the best interests of the young people in our care.
STEPS IN MAKING A COMPLAINT - Parents

**STEP 1**
Speak or write to the person involved.

Not Resolved

**STEP 2**
Speak or write to a middle manager (eg Head of Department, Head of House, Deputy Head of Junior School)

Not Resolved

**STEP 3**
Speak or write to a member of the Executive (eg Dean of Students, Head of Boarding, Dean of Curriculum, Head of Junior School)

Not Resolved

**STEP 4**
Speak or write to the Principal

Not Resolved

**STEP 5**
Speak or write to the Chairman of the Board of Governors
ISSUES OF CONCERN
Information for Junior School Students

Any Problems, Complaints, or Suggestions?
If so, the school would like to hear.

How do I make a complaint?
• By talking about it – or by writing it down if you find that easier.
• You can do it by yourself, or as part of a group, or through your parents.

To Whom?
• To anyone on staff. Some students may wish to discuss the issue with their teacher, others with a counsellor, the Deputy Head of Junior School or the Head of the Junior School.
• By discussing it, you may come up with some positive ideas.

Does it matter what the issue is?
• No, it can be a big problem or a small one.

What will happen next?
• If possible, the staff member will deal with it in person.
• If not, he or she will go on your behalf to someone who can help.

Do others have to know?
• You need to trust that your complaint will be dealt with discreetly and in the best interests of those involved.

Even if you find the issue hurtful or embarrassing, don’t worry – it will only be discussed by staff who can help you.
STEPS IN MAKING A COMPLAINT

Usually, Junior School students speak with their classroom teacher if they have a concern or a complaint. If it is not resolved by the classroom teacher, then it is most likely that a parent accompanies their daughter to go through the following steps.

STEP 1
Speaks to the person directly concerned with the issue

Not Resolved

STEP 2
Raises the issue with their classroom teacher

Not Resolved

STEP 3
Speaks with the Deputy Head of Junior School

Not Resolved

STEP 4
Speaks with the Head of Junior School

Not Resolved

STEP 5
Speaks with the Principal

Not Resolved

STEP 6
The Principal raises the issue with the Chairman of the Board of Governors
ISSUES OF CONCERN
Information for Senior School Students

Any Problems, Complaints, or Suggestions?
If so, the school would like to hear.

How do I make a complaint?
• By talking about it – or by writing it down if you find that easier.
• You can do it by yourself, or as part of a group, or through your parents.

To Whom?
• To anyone on staff. Some students may wish to discuss the issue with a teacher, others with a
counsellor, Head of Year, Head of House, Head of Department, one of the Deans, Head of
Boarding, the Deputy Head or the Principal.
• By discussing it, you may come up with some positive ideas.

Does it matter what the issue is?
• No, it can be a big problem or a small one.

What will happen next?
• If possible, the staff member will deal with it in person.
• If not, he or she will go on your behalf to someone who can help.

Do others have to know?
• You need to trust that your complaint will be dealt with discreetly and in the best interests of
those involved.

Even if you find the issue hurtful or embarrassing, don’t worry – it will only be discussed by staff who
can help you.
**STEPS IN MAKING A COMPLAINT**

Usually, Senior School students speak with a member of staff if they have a concern or a complaint. If it is not resolved by the member of staff, the students’ parent may become involved in the following steps. If it is a serious issue, the school will contact the parent. The student may commence the process at any one of the steps.

**STEP 1**
Speaks to the person directly concerned with the issue

Not Resolved

**STEP 2**
Raises the issue with a classroom teacher, a counsellor, Head of Year, Head House, Head of Department, Head of Boarding, one of the Deans or the Deputy Principal

Not Resolved

**STEP 3**
Raises the issue with the Deputy Principal

Not Resolved

**STEP 4**
Raises the issue with the Principal

Not Resolved

**STEP 6**
The Principal will raise the issue with the Chairman of the Board of Governors
COMPLAINTS MANAGEMENT – STAFF

Introduction

A work environment that is free from conflict, harassment and discrimination is the hope and preference for St Mary’s. The school does not condone behaviour or actions that breach this goal. Where conflict arises between employees, a staff Dispute and Complaints Policy is set out to help resolve the situation.

1 When differences of opinion or differences in behaviour cause offence in the workplace it is expected that individuals or groups will resolve issues between themselves through open and honest dialogue. Aggrieved parties should avoid gossiping, dealing with grievances through emails, bullying or harassment to achieve an outcome. Parties are encouraged to speak openly and honestly about their issues, engage in dialogue face to face with the other party, keep issues confidential where possible and be prepared to contribute to a resolution.

2 There may be occasions when the grievance is so serious that the aggrieved party is unable to solve the grievance face to face with the party who has caused the grievance. In such instances, the aggrieved party may need to seek assistance from a member of the Executive or Principal in the first instance.

3 The aggrieved staff member may have a support person throughout each step of the process, as may the person about whom the complaint has been made. The support person is not permitted to attend as an advocate for the aggrieved staff member.

4 Where parties need assistance, resources, expertise and wisdom are available to help.

5 An employee who wishes to withdraw a complaint should do so in writing. However, complaints that are serious in nature shall be followed up by the Principal.

6 Complaints management documents are kept in a confidential file by the Principal.

Principles for Resolving a Grievance that has been raised by Staff

- Staff have a right to a process for expression of their concerns and grievances.
- The principles of procedural fairness apply to the resolution of grievances.
- Confidentiality will be respected at all times within the constraints of the need to fully investigate the grievance.
- Individuals raising a grievance must participate in the process in good faith.
- It is important that the grievance be raised as soon as practicable from when the complaint arose.
- Unless otherwise required by the Principal, the grievance must be provided in writing.
- The school will take all reasonable steps to ensure that an individual who raises a grievance in good faith will be protected from detrimental action, including victimisation or unfair treatment.
- Grievances will be dealt with as promptly as possible.
- Whenever possible, the wishes of the individual raising the grievance, in relation to the resolution process, will be taken into account. However, this may not be possible in some circumstances where the grievance is of such serious nature that formal action is required beyond the wishes of the aggrieved party, for example when an individual raising a grievance alleges behaviour that is potentially unlawful.
- The role of a support person, a person accompanying an employee throughout the grievance procedure, is to provide emotional support to the staff member during the process and is not permitted to be an advocate for the person who is involved.
Each step of the complaints procedure may involve meeting with relevant persons as appropriate and confidentiality will be maintained as far as practicable.

Appropriate disciplinary action will be taken for any false or vexatious claims made under this procedure.

Types of work-related complaints/grievances

There are fundamentally two:

1. Behaviour which does not contravene any law or statute such as interpersonal conflict, inappropriate behaviour, or inconsistent application of policy or procedure.
2. Potentially unlawful behaviour which includes discrimination, harassment, victimisation, bullying, dishonesty or any conduct contrary to any law or statute.

Procedure for Resolving Complaints and Grievances Involving Staff

**STEP 1**
The aggrieved staff member is encouraged to begin by trying to resolve any grievance directly with the person/s concerned. The staff member is encouraged to use other staff members eg Head of Department, member of the Executive, to assist them in resolving their grievance informally.

**STEP 2**
If the grievance cannot be resolved directly with the person/s concerned, the aggrieved staff member is to raise the grievance with their immediate supervisor or leader with the view to resolution of the matter in question.

**STEP 3**
If at this point the matter is not resolved, the grievance should be raised with the appropriate member of the Executive with the view to resolution of the matter in question. At this stage, a resolution should try to be reached within 7-14 days, or if this does not look likely, an agreed timeframe should be reached with the aggrieved staff member.

**STEP 4**
If at this point the matter is not resolved, the grievance should be referred to the Principal for further investigation and discussion with the aim of resolution. The Principal may involve some member(s) of the Executive or other appropriate resources to resolve the grievance.

Staff involved with grievances which reach this stage of the procedure should attempt to reach a resolution within 7-14 days of this step being instigated and if this is unlikely, then an agreed timeframe should be reached.

**STEP 5**
If at this stage the grievance has not been resolved, the Principal will request the Chairman of the Board of Governors to assist with resolution.
FLOW CHART – Resolving Complaints and Grievances Involving Staff

The aggrieved party may have a support person throughout each step in the process

**STEP 1**
Aggrieved party should attempt to resolve the grievance informally by speaking directly to the person/s concerned

Not Resolved

**STEP 2**
Aggrieved party to raise the grievance with the employee’s supervisor

Not Resolved

**STEP 3**
Aggrieved party to raise the grievance with the appropriate member of the Executive and attempt to reach a solution within 7-14 days

Not Resolved

**STEP 4**
Aggrieved party to raise the grievance with the Principal who may choose to involve any other relevant person

Not Resolved

**STEP 5**
The Principal will request the Chairman of the Board to assist

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Legal Advice
You are able to seek legal advice at any time you wish. However, it may not be appropriate in the early stages of attempting to resolve the issue(s).