Complaints Handling Policy

Mater Christi College, Belgrave is a Catholic College established by the Sisters of the Good Samaritan of the order of St Benedict in 1963. The College operates with the consent of the Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne, is governed by an incorporated board and owned by Good Samaritan Education. Mater Christi is a proud leader in contemporary education and strives to educate young women to be Informed, Compassionate and Creative.

Purpose

Mater Christi College understands that from time-to-time complaints arise regarding aspects of our College's operation of programs and activities and that it is important that all members of the community have the opportunity to be heard. Mater Christi College commits to ensuring procedural fairness is observed when dealing with complaints and grievances.

This policy provides positive, clear and effective procedures and processes for resolving grievances between the College and community members. This can assist in building strong relationships, dispelling anxiety and ultimately providing students with a settled and happy learning environment.

Scope

The following policy and associated procedures relate to any concerns that members of the community may have – whether these are serious grievance issues, or relatively minor concerns. This policy relates to complaints about college operations by staff, volunteers, parents/carers, and complaints about staff members, teaching practice or child safety concerns from students.

Principles

Mater Christi College is committed to building a College community that features mutually beneficial, collaborative and respectful relationships. Such relationships support the learning and development of students and value the innate dignity of each person. It is important that each member of the community, including staff, parents/carers and students, are contributors to the building of the College community. A timely and professional response to complaints is an effective means of encouraging communication, building trust and resolving issues for the betterment of all concerned.

Fullfilling the roles and responsibilities in this policy does not displace or discharge any other obligations that arise if a person reasonably believes that a child is at risk of child abuse.

Statement of Policy

1. Responsibilities
   1.1. The Principal and College Executive Team are responsible for ensuring that the Complaints Handling Policy is communicated, understood and implemented consistently across the College.

Their responsibilities include:

- Promoting a culture in which complaints and concerns are welcomed, taken seriously and managed respectfully.
- Ensuring students, parents/carers, staff and volunteers are aware of the processes for raising complaints.
- Ensuring complaints are referred to the appropriate person, assessed promptly and managed in accordance with College policies and relevant legislative requirements.

- Ensuring complaints involving child safety are prioritised, with appropriate protective measures and reporting undertaken.
- Maintaining appropriate records of complaints, actions taken and outcomes.
- Ensuring procedural fairness, confidentiality and protection from victimisation throughout the complaints process.
- Reviewing complaint trends and outcomes to identify opportunities for improvement in College practices.

1.2 Staff Responsibilities

All College staff have a responsibility to contribute to a safe, respectful and supportive environment in which concerns can be raised without fear of adverse consequences.

Staff are expected to:

- Listen respectfully and respond appropriately when a student, parent/carer or other member of the College community raises a concern.
- Take all complaints seriously, particularly those involving student safety and wellbeing.
- Refer complaints to the appropriate College leader or Child Safety Officer in accordance with this policy.
- Report child safety concerns promptly and fulfil any applicable legal reporting obligations.
- Maintain confidentiality and handle information sensitively, sharing it only with those who require it to fulfil their responsibilities.
- Cooperate with complaint inquiries and provide accurate and factual information when requested.
- Refrain from investigating serious allegations independently unless authorised to do so.

1.3 Volunteer Responsibilities

Volunteers play an important role in supporting the College community and share responsibility for maintaining a safe and respectful environment.

Volunteers are expected to:

- Familiarise themselves with relevant College policies and procedures, including the Complaints Handling Policy and Child Safety policies.
- Listen respectfully to concerns or complaints raised with them.
- Promptly refer complaints or concerns to their supervising staff member, a Child Safety Officer or an appropriate College leader.
- Report any concerns relating to child safety in accordance with College procedures and applicable legal obligations.
- Maintain appropriate confidentiality and respect the privacy of those involved.
- Avoid attempting to independently investigate or resolve complaints involving serious misconduct or child safety.

1.4 Responsibilities of Staff Managing Complaints

Staff members assigned responsibility for managing or investigating complaints must:

- Ensure complaints are acknowledged and appropriately documented.
- Assess the nature and seriousness of the complaint and determine whether immediate action or escalation is required.
- Manage complaints impartially, respectfully and in accordance with procedural fairness.
- Keep relevant parties informed of the process and anticipated timeframes, where appropriate.
- Maintain accurate records of inquiries, decisions, actions and outcomes.
- Refer matters beyond their authority or expertise to the Principal, relevant College leader or appropriate external authority.
- Ensure appropriate follow-up occurs and identify any changes to practices or procedures required to prevent similar concerns arising.

1.5 Child Safety Responsibilities

All College leaders, staff and volunteers share responsibility for protecting the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

Any complaint, disclosure or concern involving suspected child abuse, misconduct or a risk to student safety must be treated seriously and acted upon promptly.

Internal reporting procedures do not replace an individual's legal obligations to report concerns to relevant external authorities. Where required, reports must be made to Victoria Police, Child Protection or other relevant regulatory authorities in accordance with applicable legislation and College Child Safety policies.

The safety and wellbeing of students must remain the primary consideration throughout the complaints process.

1.2.

2. Related policies and legislative framework
   - 2.1. MCC Parent/Carer-School Code of Conduct
   - 2.2. MCC Employee Code of Conduct
   - 2.3. Reportable Conduct Scheme

2.4. Child Safety Standards
2.5. VIT Code of Conduct
2.6. Child Information Sharing Scheme
2.7. Family Violence information Sharing Scheme

3. Guidelines.
   3.1. Complaints of a College-based nature are best received and managed at the College level, with the parties involved expected to act in good faith and work together with respect and openness to achieve an outcome acceptable to all parties. Complaints that are unable to be resolved at the local level may be escalated to the Chair of the Mater Christ College Board.
   3.2. Complainants can expect their concern or complaint to be responded to in a respectful and timely manner. The exception to this is where grievances are raised adjacent to or during term breaks or the end of year break wherein there may be delay in the school's capacity to respond and investigate.
   3.3. Staff members will be informed of formal complaints that are made about them.
   3.4. Complainants have the right to be heard and to expect that procedural fairness will be observed.
   3.5. The person against whom the complaint has been made also has that the right to be heard and to fair representation under the Catholic Education Multi Enterprise Agreement (CEMEA) 2022.
   3.6. Confidentiality, protection of privacy, respect, access, dignity and impartiality will form the basis of the complaints resolution process.
   3.7. The complaints resolution process will seek to achieve the restoration of good and respectful relationships.
   3.8. The best interests of the College community together with the interests of the individual will be taken into account.

4. Definition

   4.1. Complaint: A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with an action taken, decision made, service provided or handling of an issue at Mater Christi College.

5. Providing feedback to Mater Christi College

   5.1. Mater Christi College has procedures and processes in place by which parents /carers and the broader College community can confidently raise concerns in the knowledge that they will be listened to and their concerns will be professionally managed in a timely, confidential and appropriate manner.

   5.2. Relationships with the College community are important to us. We take complaints raised by parents/carers and the broader College community seriously. There are many avenues to provide feedback to College staff. These include:

      5.2.1. Feedback (email footer)

      5.2.2. Scheduled parent/carer feedback surveys

      5.2.3. Meetings with the Principal or other staff members to express concerns

      5.2.4. Other avenues that arise such as Progress Meetings

6. Types of complaints and appropriate contacts

The nature of the complaint will determine who is the most appropriate person or body to manage the concerns raised.

   6.1. Student complaints

      6.1.1. Complaints by students about teaching practice should be directed to the Deputy Principal – Learning and Teaching.

6.1.2. Complaints by students who do not feel safe with a staff member can be made to any Child Safety Officer. These staff members are named and pictured on the PROTECT posters throughout the school.

6.1.3. Student can also make confidential complaints via the student safety concerns link on SIMON.

6.2. College Operations

6.2.1. Concerns regarding Teaching and Learning at Mater Christi should in the first instance be discussed directly with the teacher. If this is not possible contact should be made with the Domain Leader and/or the Deputy Principal – Learning.

6.2.2. Concerns about the wellbeing of a student or students should be directed to the Year Learning Leader. If this is not possible contact should be made with the Deputy Principal – Staff and Students. If you are concerned about a student's immediate safety please dial 000 and ask for the appropriate service.

6.2.3. Concerns about a staff member, (other than 4.2, below) should be directed to the Deputy Principal - Staff and Students and/or the Principal.

6.3. Misconduct or serious misconduct

6.3.1. All complaints of alleged misconduct or serious misconduct by a teacher or staff member should be reported to the Principal of Mater Christi College.

6.3.2. Complaints about teachers can also be reported to the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) – the regulator in relation to the registration and investigation of serious misconduct (including conduct which is of a physical or emotional nature) of all teachers in the state of Victoria. If unsure whether the complaint constitutes serious misconduct by a teacher, contact the VIT on 1300 888 067 or vit@vit.vic.edu.au.

6.3.3. In some cases, certain actions which involve physical or emotional misconduct, such as unlawful assault or threats to the person, may constitute a criminal offence. These types of offences should be reported to and investigated by the police. Initial consultation with the Principal of Mater Christi College may help to determine the appropriate course of action in these circumstances.

6.4. Child abuse (including sexual offences)

6.4.1. Complaints of alleged child abuse (including sexual offences) of College students should be reported to the Principal of Mater Christi College

6.4.2. There are legal obligations on all adults to report child abuse to police once a reasonable belief is formed that a sexual offence has been committed against a child. Failure to disclose a sexual offence against a child is a criminal offence under section 327 of the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic.) (Crimes Act) and applies to all adults (18 years of age and over) in Victoria.

6.4.3. Communication with children under 16 years of age by teachers, staff or any other person to prepare or groom a child for future sexual activity is a criminal offence under section 49M(1) of the Crimes Act and must be reported to the police. The offence of grooming applies to any person aged 18 years or over and does not apply to communication between people who are both under 18 years of age.

6.5. Complaints of serious misconduct against the Principal of Mater Christi College

6.5.1. In the case of a complaint of serious misconduct about the Principal of Mater Christi College, the Chair of the Mater Christi College Board should be informed in writing. Such correspondence should be directed to the email chair@materchristi.edu.au

6.6. Anonymous complaints

6.6.1. Mater Christi College endeavours to address and respond to all complaints. In some

situations, we may not be able to fully address complaints that are made anonymously or without sufficient detail being provided to enable an inquiry or resolution of the matter.

6.6.2. To ensure procedural fairness, respondents have a right to know the particulars of the allegations being made against them and be given an opportunity to respond to them. Where possible, complainants are encouraged to give their names and to be reassured that we will deal with complaints professionally and in accordance with procedural fairness and confidentiality.

6.6.3. If the complainant wishes to remain anonymous, it is at the Principal's discretion what, if any, action will be taken. Anonymous complaints will be recorded in the same manner that all other complaints are recorded.

6.7. Vexatious and publicly aired complaints

6.7.1. Where complaints have been made that have not been substantiated, Mater Christi College will seek to repair the relationship between the complainant and the respondent.

6.7.2. Should an unsubstantiated complaint continue in a public forum, such as on a social media platform, the College reserves the right to seek redress.

6.8. Complaints in relation to Information Sharing Schemes

6.8.1. Mater Christi College is a prescribed Information Sharing Entity (ISE) that may share information under the Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS), The Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM) and the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS). The College, as an ISE, may receive complaints from individuals in relation to its conduct as an ISE under the CISS or FVISS. It may also receive a complaint from another ISE.

6.8.2. The following information is recorded where a complaint is received under the CISS or FVISS

6.8.2.1. the date the complaint was made and received
6.8.2.2. the nature of the complaint
6.8.2.3. the action taken to resolve the complaint
6.8.2.4. the action taken to lessen or prevent the issue from recurring
6.8.2.5. the time taken to resolve the complaint
6.8.2.6. further action taken if the complaint was not resolved.

6.9. Complaints relating to Reportable Conduct

6.9.1. Legal obligations are imposed on the Principal and Board Directors of Mater Christi College to report to the Commission for Child and Young People (CCYP), and investigate allegations of reportable conduct, where those allegations are based on a person's reasonable belief that reportable conduct or misconduct involving reportable conduct has occurred. Reportable conduct includes the following:

- sexual offences against, with or in the presence of a child
- sexual misconduct against, with or in the presence of a child
- physical violence against, with or in the presence of a child
- behaviour that causes significant psychological or emotional harm
- significant neglect

6.9.2. Complaints relating to a reportable conduct allegation which meets the requisite threshold and which involves a College employee (which amongst others, can include a teacher, principal, volunteer or contractor) must be reported.

6.9.3. Complaints of reportable conduct in relation to an employee (other than the Principal) at Mater Christi College should be reported to the principal.

6.9.4. Complaints of reportable conduct involving the Principal should be reported to the

Mater Christi College Board Chair.

6.9.5. Further information can be found on the CCYP Website.

7. Procedures for lodging a complaint

7.1. The College will not respond to complaints or concerns that do not utilise available official mechanisms. This includes concerns raised publicly on social media or through private channels such as WhatsApp or similar services.

The following steps can guide the procedure in making a complaint about issues arising at Mater Christi College.

7.2. Clarify the issue

7.2.1. Be clear about the topic or issue to be discussed.

7.2.2. Be mindful of the need to ascertain all the facts relating to the circumstances of the topic or issue.

7.2.3. Think about what an acceptable outcome would be.

7.2.4. Check and observe the Mater Christi College complaints handling policy

7.3. Making the complaint

7.3.1. Write an appropriate note or email to the relevant person (see 6.1) outlining your concerns.

7.3.2. Make an appointment to speak via telephone or in person with the relevant person/s.

7.3.3. Arrange meeting times or phone calls through the Mater Christi College office.

7.3.4. Ensure the relevant person/s is given a reasonable amount of time to take the steps required to resolve or address the concerns. *Note that there will be a delay in responses to complaints made adjacent to or during term and end of year breaks.*

7.4. Resolution

7.4.1. If the issue remains unresolved after discussion with the relevant person/s at the College, request an appointment, through the Mater Christi College office, to discuss the concern with a Deputy Principal or Principal.

7.4.2. The principal may be represented by another senior staff member. If the relevant staff member is going to be present at the meeting, the meeting time is more likely to occur outside classroom hours.

8. Expectations of and information for parents /carers

8.1. In making a complaint, Mater Christi College requests and expects that the complainant will:

8.1.1. raise the concern or complaint as soon as possible after the issue has arisen
8.1.2. communicate and respond in ways that are constructive, fair and respectful
8.1.3. provide complete and factual information about the concern or complaint
8.1.4. observe confidentiality and a respect for sensitive issues
8.1.5. act in good faith to achieve an outcome acceptable to all parties
8.1.6. have realistic and reasonable expectations about possible outcomes/remedies.

8.2. Parent/Carers Code of Conduct

8.2.1. Parents/carers making complaints are to follow the Parent/Carers Code of Conduct found on the College Website.

8.2.2. Parents/Carers who are unreasonable, threatening or discourteous can expect their discussions with a member of staff to be terminated until such time as an alternative discussion time is arranged by the College.

8.3. Complaints about a Mater Christi College student

8.3.1. If your concern/complaint relates to your child's treatment by another student or students while at Mater Christi College, we expect that you will refer your complaint directly to the College, via your child's Home Group Mentor and/or Year Learning Leader.

8.3.2. Under no circumstances should a parent/carer approach another student in the care of the College to discuss the issue or chastise them. 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.

9. College processes for dealing with complaints

9.1. Inquiry

9.1.1. The College will record the details of all complaints including the name and contact details of the person/s making the complaint. The College will then refer the complaint to the most appropriate person to undertake an inquiry.

9.1.2. There will be many occasions that this will be someone other than the principal. The staff member conducting the inquiry may conduct a preliminary inquiry or communicate with the parent to discuss the matter further.

9.1.3. If the scope of the inquiry is beyond the capacity or jurisdiction of the College, the matter will be referred to the appropriate body or authority and the parent/carer will be informed of the referral.

9.2. Support Person

9.2.1. Parents/carers discussing complaints with the Principal may be accompanied by a support person.

9.2.2. The support person can be a family member, a friend or a professional with knowledge of the student.

9.2.3. Any person acting in a professional capacity on behalf of the parents/carers must provide their occupational details and full name prior to the meeting being held. It is at the principal's discretion if an external professional is a participating member of any College meeting.

9.2.4. The support person may encourage and facilitate sharing of parent/guardian/carer knowledge, perception and issues.

9.2.5. The support person should support a positive working relationship between all parties.

9.2.6. The support person does not speak on behalf of parents/carers when discussing complaints with the principal.

9.3. Inquiries into the complaint

9.3.1. Any inquiry conducted by the College will be done so in a timely, efficient and confidential manner, ensuring the fair principles of natural justice are applied for all.

9.3.2. Parents/carers will be provided with an anticipated timeframe for a resolution.

9.3.3. The staff member conducting the inquiry will record the details of the inquiry.

9.3.4. Privacy laws may prohibit information being provided to the complainant of any specific action that has been taken in relation to individuals about whom the complaint has been raised.

9.3.5. Where no evidence has been found to support the complaint, the College will endeavour to support both parties to reach a mutually agreeable resolution.

10. Outcomes of complaints

Outcomes of complaints and grievances that have been substantiated can include the following:

10.1. an apology – either verbal or written

10.2. mediation – with an internal or external mediator

10.3. an official warning

10.4. disciplinary action

10.5. a behavioural contract (in the case of a student)

10.6. pastoral or spiritual care

10.7. an understanding that the behaviour will not be repeated

10.8. a change in policy or procedure.

11. Complaint Escalation

If the matter cannot be resolved at the College level, the complainant may contact the Chair of the College Board by contact the Mater Christi College Company Secretary.

12. Withdrawal of a Complaint

A complaint can be withdrawn at any stage during the complaint management procedures. A complaint should be retracted in writing by the complainant and addressed to the principal of Mater Christi College.

13. Governance

14. Document Details	
Title:	Complaints Handling Policy
Policy Approval	College Board
Policy Owner	Principal
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