Complaints Handling Procedure for the St Agnes’ Staff and School Community.

St Agnes’ Staff

The complaints handling procedure in this policy is one in which complaints are investigated by a Complaints Officer or a member of the leadership team. This policy also provides for appeals. The policy is based on one contained in the document "Harassment in the Workplace - Guidelines for Employers, Managers, Supervisors and EEO Personnel", Anti-Discrimination Board, New South Wales, 1995, p 23.]

The essential elements of a complaints handling procedure are to:

- explain the meaning of "complaint";
- ensure confidentiality, no victimisation, fairness, timeliness;
- explain in detail what an employee with a complaint can do - state the different options available;
- explain what will happen once a formal complaint is made;
- detail outcomes if complaint substantiated, unsubstantiated;
- explain appeals procedure;
- include names of contact officers, Complaints Officer/s; and
- mention right of employee to go to outside agency if dissatisfied.

Purpose of this Procedure

At St Agnes we are committed to providing a pleasant work environment for all employees and students. We acknowledge, however, that Staff and students can sometimes feel aggrieved about something that is happening at the St Agnes which appears to be discriminatory or to constitute harassment. A member of Staff or a student can have a complaint about any decision, behaviour, act or omission (whether by the Principal, members of the leadership team or other staff/students) that he/she feels is discriminatory or constitutes harassment.

The purpose of this document is to provide a procedure by which employees/students can have such complaints addressed.

If you feel that you are being harassed or discriminated against, this complaints handling procedure is available to you so your concerns can be addressed.

No victimisation. You can also rest assured that if you make a complaint you will not suffer in any way as a consequence. The Principal/Authorities will ensure that a person who makes a complaint is not victimised in any way.

Key elements of our complaints handling procedure

The following are the key elements of our complaints handling procedure:

Impartiality. If you make a complaint, it will be investigated in a fair and impartial manner. No judgments or assumptions will be made, and no action will be taken until the investigation is complete. If a complaint is made against you, your rights will be protected and you will be given an opportunity to tell your side of the story.

Confidentiality. You can feel secure that if you do make a complaint under this policy, it will remain confidential. The only people who will have access to information about the complaint will be the person making the complaint and the person investigating.

Timeliness. Each complaint will be finalised within as short a period as possible. All complaints should be finalised within one month.

What to do if you have a complaint

1. Approach the person involved.

In many situations, the most appropriate thing to do first is to tell the person who is the cause of
Complaints Handling Procedure for the St Agnes’ Staff and School Community.

the complaint how you feel. If the complaint is about their behaviour, tell them that it is offensive/hurtful/not acceptable. If it is about a work decision, tell them why you think it is discriminatory or harassment. Telling the person will give them a chance to stop or change what they are doing.

2. Go to Principal
If you don’t feel as if you can approach the person directly, then go and explain the problem to the Principal. This person has been trained to be the first point of contact for people with complaints. The Principal will advise you about what your options are and what will happen if you decide to make a formal complaint. Nothing will be done in relation to the complaint without your agreeing.

What happens next?
Once you have made the complaint to the Principal will then consider whether there are any reasons why he should not proceed to deal with the complaint. For example, the person you complained about may be a personal friend. If there is such a reason, which indicates it is inappropriate for the Principal to deal with your complaint, it will, with your consent, be referred to another appropriate person.

The Principal will then interview you. During this interview a number of things will be explained to you, such as what will happen if the complaint is found to be supported by the evidence, or if it is found to be not supported by the evidence. You will also be told where you can go for assistance if you are not happy with the way the school is dealing with the complaint. The Principal will then take a written record of the complaint.

The Principal will then talk to the person about whom the complaint is made to hear that side of the story. Any witnesses will also be interviewed. These interviews will be conducted separately and impartially. The importance of confidentiality will be stressed to all parties and they will be warned of the consequences if there is a breach of confidentiality (e.g. possible defamation action, initiation of a complaint for harassment).

The Principal will then tell you what the other people said and discuss what should be done to sort out the problem. You should tell the Principal what action you would like taken, e.g. a written apology from the person, a written warning, etc.

Review
If the complaint remains unresolved it will be reviewed by the Principal who will make a final decision as to the outcome of the complaint. (Note that this review step will only be possible if the principal has not been acting as the Complaints Officer.)

Possible outcomes
If the complaint is proved, the following are possible outcomes:
- a written apology;
- an official warning;
- counselling;
- disciplinary action; or
- dismissal.

If the complaint is unproved (not enough evidence), possible outcomes are:
- relevant training for all staff; and/or
- monitoring of behaviour of employees.

If the complaint is proved not to have happened at all, the following are possible outcomes:
- counselling for the person who made the complaint;
- a written apology;
- an official warning;
- disciplinary action; or
- dismissal.

The Principal will make sure that whatever outcome is decided upon actually happens. He/she will also assess the effectiveness of the outcome from time to time.

Appeals
- Avenues for appeal are

In the Melbourne Archdiocese – the coordinating Chairperson, Pastoral Care Unit Catholic Education Office Melbourne
Complaints Handling Procedure for the St Agnes’ Staff and School Community.

If you feel that the complaints procedure has not been followed properly, or that the outcome is unacceptable to you, you may appeal to a designated person not involved in the complaints procedure.

The Designated person will look at the way the complaint was handled and examine the outcome. If he/she believes it was handled properly and that the outcome was appropriate he/she will take no further action. If he/she thinks that the complaint was not handled properly, or that the outcome was inappropriate, he/she will organise for the complaint to be looked at again.

The appeal will be dealt with by someone other than the person who first handled the complaint.

Go to an external agency
If you are not happy with the way your complaint has been dealt with by the school you may wish to go to an external agency (Catholic Education Office 92670228) for further advice and assistance. You may take your complaint to the external agency at any stage in the procedure if you are unhappy with progress in dealing with your complaint.

Complaints contact offices and Complaints Officer/s

The Complaints Officer is Andrew Butler, Principal St Agnes School Highett

Signed

Andrew Butler
Complaints Handling Procedure for the St Agnes’ Staff and School Community.

St Agnes’ School Community

Purpose of this Procedure:
Good relationships within the community give children a greater chance of having a successful educational experience. It is important students, staff and parents work together in solving any issues or problems that may arise.

The spirit of the procedure is one of equity and justice. It is based on the belief that home and school form a partnership for the mutual benefit of students.

All issues are resolved based on our St. Agnes’ School Community Values – Respect, Responsibility, Honesty, Trustworthiness and Tolerance.

Aims:
- To establish clear guidelines for dealing with any complaints/concerns between the St Agnes’ staff and the community.
- To resolve complaints/concerns as quickly as possible and in an impartial manner.
- To ensure all issues are dealt with confidentiality.
- To ensure everyone is treated with respect.
- To ensure any unresolved complaints/concerns are dealt with by the Principal.

Implementation:

STEPS

1. Arrange a time to speak to the relevant staff member about the complaint/concern.
2. Teachers are available in their classrooms between 8:30am – 8:40am daily or after school on a Wednesday to Friday.
3. Please do not enter school classrooms or offices about a complaint/concern without prior arrangement. Teachers will not discuss issues during class time because issues cannot be addressed satisfactorily while teachers are teaching.
4. Let the teacher know what you consider to be the issue prior to the meeting.
5. Allow a negotiated time frame for the problem to be addressed after the meeting. Complaints will be recorded.
6. If the complaint/concern isn’t addressed satisfactorily, arrange an appointment to speak with either the Principal or Vice Principal. Complaints will be recorded and final decisions will be relayed to the parents.
7. It is never appropriate at school for a parent to directly approach a child/ren or their parents over a problem or issue even if the problem or issue is not school related.
8. Meetings to discuss complaints/concerns will be suspended if any person behaves in an insulting or offensive manner.
9. Any unresolved complaints/concerns will be dealt with by the Principal.

Evaluation:
- This policy will be reviewed annually as part of the school’s four-year review cycle.
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