

Directive No:	PCCC v3
Approval Date:	July 2024
Previous Review Date:	September 2011
Next Review Date:	July 2026
Author:	Director of Catholic Schools

Parent and Caregiver Concerns and Complaints Procedures

PURPOSE

In a spirit of partnership between home and school there must be a commitment to respond positively to critical feedback to ensure that people have the opportunity to contribute to the continued improvement of schools. It is expected that all staff will ensure that a culture of consultation and open dialogue is nurtured at every level.

It is acknowledged that parents/caregivers can feel concerned about an incident or something that they believe is happening in their child's school. The satisfactory resolution of any concern or complaint is vital to the Christian life and the wellbeing of the community. It is recognised that parents and caregivers must have access to processes that allow them to resolve concerns and complaints in a supportive, conciliatory environment. Concerns and complaints need to be addressed as far as possible at the local level, responsively, openly and in a timely manner.

These procedures are required to be implemented in all Catholic schools in the Diocese of Lismore.

APPLICATION

These procedures apply to all employees in schools, Diocese of Lismore Catholic Schools (DLCS) and any related entities under the administration of Diocese of Lismore Catholic Schools Limited (DLCSL).

PROCEDURES

1. DEFINITIONS

- 1.1 **Baseless** means without a basis in reason, fact or law.
- 1.2 **Concern** means a matter that evokes a feeling of anxiety or worry.
- 1.3 **Complaint** means a matter causing grievance or leading to a formal accusation including formalising an unresolved concern.
- 1.4 **DLCS** means Diocese of Lismore Catholic Schools.
- 1.5 **Procedural Fairness** means a process that provides fairness to all parties. It includes the right to be heard, the right to be treated without bias, the right to be informed of allegations being made and to be provided with an opportunity to respond to them and the right to information regarding the status of the complaint.
- 1.6 **Vexatious** means an allegation made without substance and with the intent of being malicious or to cause distress to the person against whom the allegation was made.

- 1.7 **Vindictive** means showing malicious ill will and a desire to hurt; motivated by spite; disposed to revenge; prompted or characterised by revenge.

2. SCOPE

These procedures describe the process by which complaints are raised by a parent or caregiver within an individual school, or escalated to DLCS where necessary.

3. INTRODUCTION

3.1 Schools in the Diocese of Lismore seek to:

- a) Develop a positive and collaborative relationship between home and school;
- b) Welcome and value diversity of opinion;
- c) Ensure staff are aware of community expectations and the needs of students and families;
- d) Develop clear and open communication within the community; and
- e) Ensure the wellbeing of the student is the central focus of all processes.

4 THE FOCUS OF THE PROCEDURES

4.1 These procedures apply to the concerns and complaints of parents and caregivers around all issues associated with school life.

4.2 Exclusions:

- a) Certain matters concerning child protection or other areas covered by specific legislation must be referred immediately to the relevant external agency;
- b) School actions in certain matters related to secondary school curriculum may be governed by NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) regulations;
- c) Students, parents or caregivers may appeal to the NESA for decisions that affect the School Certificate, Higher School Certificate or withheld school credentials; and
- d) Complaints by members of the broader community are not covered by these procedures.

5. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

5.1 Concerns and complaints will be resolved according to the principles of procedural fairness.

5.2 Every endeavour will be made to address all concerns and complaints within reasonable timeframes. However, Principals and school staff may not always be available to address the issue at the time it is raised, but will do so at the earliest practicable opportunity.

6. THE RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARENTS/CAREGIVERS

- 6.1 Any parent or caregiver has the right to raise a concern or complaint and have it responded to promptly and without fear of repercussions according to principles of procedural fairness. Many issues will be able to be resolved informally.
- 6.2 Any concern or complaint should address the individual situation and not be presented in a group action to the school.
- 6.3 Any parent or caregiver has the right to confidentiality otherwise than required by law in regard to a concern or complaint that is raised at the school. However, where others need to be informed, this will be explained to the parent or caregiver raising the matter.
- 6.4 Any parent or caregiver has a responsibility to maintain confidentiality in the best interests of all involved.

- 6.5 Any parent or caregiver has a responsibility to promptly raise concerns or complaints so that these do not become overwhelming for either the child or the family.
- 6.6 Formal complaints need to be put in writing to be acted upon. Complaints received by email are regarded as 'in writing'.

7 THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF PRINCIPALS

- 7.1 The Principal has a responsibility to publicise and implement these procedures.
- 7.2 The Principal has a responsibility to manage concerns and complaints respectfully, effectively and to respond to parent or caregiver issues in a timely manner.
- 7.3 Respecting the wishes of the Parish Priest regarding consultation, the Principal has a responsibility to bring to the attention of the Parish Priest matters of serious complaint.
- 7.4 The Principal has a responsibility to ensure all notes, records (written and electronic), agendas, and diary entries in relation to the concern or complaint are kept secure, centrally and accurately in accordance with the Student Records Policy.

8 THE ROLE OF THE PARISH PRIEST

- 8.1 In assisting the Principal with matters of school management, the Parish Priest will bring to the attention of the Principal all written complaints relating to the school raised by parents or caregivers.

9 THE PROCESS

- 9.1 The process will vary depending on the nature of the issue. In these procedures, complaints are regarded as more serious than concerns and will therefore be managed differently.
- 9.2 For both concerns and complaints the issue is generally best dealt with in the first instance by the person who is the subject of the concern or who is responsible for the particular matter. This may not always be possible and the parents or caregivers may not feel able to talk to the person about whom they have a concern. In these situations, the complainant must decide the most appropriate person to address the complaint. In general:
 - a) Where the concern or complaint involves a staff member of the school, the matter should be taken directly to the Principal; and
 - b) Any parent complaint forwarded to DLCS that has not been raised with the school will be directed back to the school for the school's attention and the Principal notified of the contact [excluding any complaint about the Principal].
- 9.3 Persons who phone DLCS to raise a concern or complaint about a school issue will be informed that the matter must be put in writing if they wish it to be progressed. The written complaint will be acknowledged and delegated to the appropriate DLCS staff member to follow up with the complainant and the Principal.

10 MANAGING CONCERNS

- 10.1 Any parent or caregiver has a responsibility to promptly raise the concern with the person best placed to deal with the concern so that these do not become overwhelming for either the child or the family.
- 10.2 Where the parent or caregiver concern is not satisfactorily resolved directly with the school staff member involved, the matter should be taken up with other appropriate school staff in suitable positions of responsibility. In secondary schools this may be the Year or KLA coordinator or the Assistant Principal or Principal. In primary schools this may be the Assistant Principal or Principal.

- 10.3 If the matter cannot be resolved within the school, the Principal should seek advice from the relevant DLCS staff member on the appropriate course of action.

11 MANAGING FORMAL COMPLAINTS TO THE SCHOOL

- 11.1 A formal complaint is defined as a complaint that is in writing, signed and directed to the Principal or DLCS. Complaints in writing directed to DLCS, if not raised at the school level in the first instance, will be referred to the relevant Principal for action.
- 11.2 A meeting will be arranged at the earliest possible opportunity by the Principal. The Principal will determine the attendance for part or the whole of the meeting of any additional and relevant staff. The complainant will be aware of the attendees prior to the meeting.
- 11.3 The meeting will be conducted formally, following an agenda organised by the Principal. The Principal will ensure a record will be taken. A recording device will only be used with the agreement of all parties. This recording becomes the official meeting record. Participants will receive a copy of the record following the meeting. Participants will have the right to note any disagreement with the record. This will be attached to the record of meeting. The meeting will seek a resolution of the complaint.
- 11.4 A person raising a formal complaint may have an appropriate support person present during meetings or interviews. The support person acts as an observer and does not take an active role in the meeting. The Principal is to be advised of the attendance of a support person before any meeting or interview. Similarly, the Principal will advise of any other person they may invite to attend.
- 11.5 By mutual agreement it may be decided that further meetings are required.
- 11.6 The meeting will be terminated if any person present becomes abusive, uses profane or threatening language or attempts to physically intimidate others present. The meeting record will be reflective of this outcome. Should this occur the relevant DLCS staff member will be notified.
- 11.7 Access to relevant records may be given to parties directly involved in the process or to others by mutual consent whilst adhering to the Student Records Policy.
- 11.8 The outcome of a complaint resolution meeting will be communicated to the parent or caregiver in writing. There may be an agreement to review its effectiveness within an agreed timeframe.

12. MANAGING FORMAL COMPLAINTS TO DLCS

- 12.1 Complainants not satisfied with the outcome of a complaint to a school can refer the matter to DLCS by writing to the Director of Catholic Schools. Depending on the nature of the complaint a DLCS staff member or Assistant Director will be delegated to attend to the issue.
- 12.2 The representative of DLCS will liaise with the Principal and the complainant seeking a resolution. Advice may be offered to all parties to reconvene or a further meeting may be convened involving a representative of the DLCS in the process.
- 12.3 Following this intervention the complainant will receive written advice from the DLCS representative. The Principal will receive a copy of this advice.
- 12.4 Anonymous complaints or allegations will not be accepted except in the case of:
- a) Allegations of child abuse;
 - b) Allegations of misconduct of a sexual nature by a staff member against a student; and
 - c) Alleged breaches of legislation, including the *Crimes Act 1900* (NSW).

- 12.5 Where the complaint involves the Principal it may be directed, if the complainant believes it necessary, to the Director of Catholic Schools, DLCS. In this case the Principal will be informed of the complaint by the Director and the process to be followed. The Principal will receive any complaints raised against them in writing. The Parish Priest will also be notified.

13 TIME FRAMES

- 13.1 Unless another timeframe is mutually agreed upon, or where outside authorities are involved, a parent/caregiver can expect:
- a) An acknowledgement of his/her concern as soon as possible but no longer than within five (5) days; and
 - b) An initial attempt to address and resolve the matter as soon as practicable with updates provided throughout the process.

14 CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS OF A CHILD PROTECTION NATURE

- 14.1 Legally required processes for the management of complaints that fall within the definitions of child protection legislation are administered by DLCS which is accountable to the Office of Children's Guardian and/or NSW Department of Community and Justice.

15 BASELESS, VINDICTIVE AND VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS

- 15.1 At some point in the process of managing a complaint it may be determined that the complaint is baseless. This determination will be fully explained to the complainant. The complainant may seek further redress through the appropriate DLCS staff member. This must be in writing, fully explaining the reasons for further consideration.
- 15.2 Where a complaint is considered by the Principal to be vindictive or vexatious the matter should immediately be referred to DLCS for consideration. External advice may be sought in bringing the matter to conclusion. Any decision or outcome in bringing the matter to a close will be put in writing to the complainant.
- 15.3 Any outcome or decision in relation to baseless, vindictive or vexatious complaints made by DLCS is final and no further redress will be available through this process.

ENQUIRIES

Director of Catholic Schools

RELATED DOCUMENTATION

The Mission of Jesus Christ Foundational Values: Catholic Education in the Diocese of Lismore

Child Safeguarding Policy

Privacy Policy

Student Records Policy

Crimes Act 1900 (NSW)

Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)

Children's Guardian Act 2019 (NSW)

Disability Standards in Education (2005)

Child Safe Standards NSW