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## COMPLAINT-HANDLING PROCEDURE

### St Thomas the Apostle Catholic Primary School

#### Cranbourne East

#### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

St Thomas the Apostle Catholic Primary School, Cranbourne East is committed to building a school community that features positive and respectful relationships. Within our school, relationships are founded in the gospel values of justice, compassion, reconciliation and kindness. 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 school staff (including volunteers and contractors), parents, guardians, carers and students, are contributors to the building of the school 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.

St Thomas the Apostle understands that from time to time complaints arise and that it is important that all members of the community have the opportunity to be heard. St Thomas the Apostle commits to ensuring procedural fairness is observed when dealing with complaints and grievances.

## 2.0 PURPOSE

All schools managed and operated by the Diocese of Sale Catholic Education Limited (**DOSCEL**) are required to develop, maintain and publicise a fair, effective and efficient complaint-handling process, so that complaints about events or decisions at the school can be addressed.

The purpose of this procedure is to:

- provide an outline of the complaints process at St Thomas the Apostle so that students, parents, guardians, carers and members of the community are informed of how they can raise complaints or concerns about issues arising at our school
- ensure that all complaints and concerns regarding St Thomas the Apostle are managed in a timely, effective, fair and respectful manner and in accordance with the [DOSCEL Complaints and Grievances Management Policy](#).

## 3.0 SCOPE

This procedure relates to complaints brought by students, parents, guardians, carers, or members of our school community and applies to all matters relating to our school.

Complaints, concerns or reports relating to suspected child abuse will be managed in accordance with the following DOSCEL policies and procedures:

- Protection of Children – Reporting Obligations Procedure
- [Protection of Children – Anti-Grooming Policy](#)
- [Protection of Children – Failure to Disclose Policy](#)
- [Protection of Children – Failure to Protect Policy](#)
- [Mandatory Reporting Policy](#)
- [Guide to Reporting Conduct under the Reportable Conduct Scheme](#)
- Child and Family Violence Information Sharing Schemes Policy and Procedure.

## **4.0 PROCEDURES**

St Thomas the Apostle welcomes feedback, both positive and negative, and is committed to continuous improvement. We value open communication with our families and community members and are committed to understanding complaints and addressing them appropriately. We recognise that the complaints process provides an important opportunity for reflection and learning.

We value and encourage open and positive relationships with our school community. We understand that it is in the best interests of students for there to be a trusting relationship between families and our school.

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

- be considerate of each other's views and respect each other's role
- be focused on resolution of the complaint, with the interests of the student involved at the centre
- act in good faith and cooperation
- behave with respect and courtesy
- respect the privacy and confidentiality of those involved, as appropriate
- operate within and seek reasonable resolutions that comply with any applicable legislation and DOSCEL policy
- recognise that schools and DOSCEL may be subject to legal constraints on their ability to act or disclose information in some circumstances.

## 4.1 COMPLAINTS AND CONCERNS PROCESS FOR STUDENTS

St Thomas the Apostle acknowledges that issues or concerns can cause stress or worry for students and impact their wellbeing and learning. St Thomas the Apostle encourages our students to raise issues or concerns as they arise so that we can work together to resolve them.

Students with a concern or complaint can raise them with a trusted adult at school, for example, with your classroom teacher; another teacher within your community; a member of Leadership. This person will take your concern or complaint seriously and will explain to you what steps we can take to try to resolve the issue and support you.

You can also ask to have another trusted adult present as a support person when discussing your concern or you can ask your parent, guardian, carer or another trusted adult outside of the school, to talk to us about the issue instead.

Other ways you can raise a concern or complaint with us include:

- talking to a member of student leadership about your concern and any suggestions you have for resolving it
- talking with a family member who can then raise your concerns with the school

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

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

## **4.2 COMPLAINTS AND CONCERNS PROCESS FOR PARENTS, GUARDIANS, CARERS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS**

### **Preparation for raising a concern or complaint**

St Thomas the Apostle encourages parents, guardians, carers or other members of the school community who may wish to submit a concern or complaint to:

- carefully consider the issues you would like to discuss
- remember you may not have all the facts relating to the issues that you want to raise
- think about how the matter could be resolved
- be informed by checking the policies and guidelines set by DOSCEL and St Thomas the Apostle (see the "Related Policies and Procedures" section below).

When raising concerns or complaints, parents, guardians, carers and community members are expected to adhere to the school Parent, Guardian and Carer Code of Conduct and are reminded of the expectation to communicate and respond in a respectful way, including using respectful language.

### **Support person**

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.

### **Raising a concern**

St Thomas the Apostle is always happy to discuss with parents, guardians, carers and community members any concerns that they may have.

Concerns in the first instance should be directed to the classroom teacher. The classroom teacher will in turn escalate the concern through a member of Leadership if the concern cannot be resolved. Where possible, school staff will work with you to ensure that your concerns are appropriately addressed.

### **Making a complaint**

Where concerns cannot be resolved in this way, parents, guardians, carers or community members may wish to make a formal complaint to a representative of the school's Leadership Team; this may include the Principal, Deputy Principal of Teaching and Learning, Deputy Principal of Inclusive Education or Community Learning Leader.

If you would like to make a formal complaint, in most cases and depending on the nature of the complaint raised, our school will first seek to understand the issues and will then convene a resolution meeting with the aim of resolving the complaint together. The following process will apply:

- 1. Complaint received:** Please either email, telephone or arrange a meeting through the front office with either of the Deputy Principals (Learning and Teaching or Inclusive Education) or Principal, to outline your complaint so that we can fully understand what the issues are. We can discuss your complaint in a way that is convenient for you, whether in writing, in person, via video conference or over the phone.
- 2. Information gathering:** Depending on the issues raised in the complaint, the Principal, Deputy Principal of Learning and Teaching or Deputy Principal of Inclusive Education, or delegate may need to gather further information to properly understand the situation. This process may also involve speaking to others to obtain details about the situation or the concerns raised.
- 3. Response:** Where possible, a resolution meeting will be arranged with either of the Deputy Principals or Principal to discuss the complaint with the objective of reaching a resolution satisfactory for all parties. We acknowledge that a face-to-face resolution meeting provides the best opportunity to maintain a working relationship between the family and the school.

If, however after the resolution meeting we are unable to resolve the complaint together, we will work with you to produce a written summary of the complaint in the event you would like to take further action. Preparing a written summary together ensures that all parties understand the issues in dispute and reach an agreement about the most important issues that need to be addressed further.

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

**4. Timelines:**

St Thomas the Apostle will acknowledge receipt of your complaint as soon as possible (usually within two school days) and will seek to resolve complaints in a timely manner. We understand that early management of complaints is an important element in addressing concerns.

Depending on the complexity of the complaint, St Thomas the Apostle may need some time to gather enough information to fully understand the circumstances of your complaint. We will endeavour to complete any necessary information gathering and hold a resolution meeting where appropriate within 5 working days of the complaint being raised. In situations

where further time is required, St Thomas the Apostle will consult with you and discuss any interim solutions to the dispute that can be put in place.

### **Unacceptable and unreasonable complainant conduct**

At St Thomas we engage in respectful conflict resolution; the school also places high value and priority on maintaining a safe and respectful working environment for our school staff.

We recognise that complaint resolution can be an emotive process, however while we consider a range of factors and views, at any point in the process outlined in this Procedure

we may consider a parent(s), guardian(s) or carer(s) behaviour to be unreasonable. We would regard certain behaviours as harmful and unacceptable insofar as they compromise the safety and professional wellbeing of our school staff. These behaviours include, but are not limited to:-

- shouting or swearing, either in person or on the telephone
- physical or verbal intimidation
- aggressive hand gestures
- writing rude, defamatory, aggressive or abusive comments to/about a staff member (including via email or social media)
- use of language which would be considered racist, sexist, homophobic or discriminatory on religious or gender grounds
- damage or violation of possessions/property.

When a complainant behaves in such unacceptable ways, the Principal, Deputy Principal of Learning and Teaching, Deputy Principal of Inclusive Education or the Community Learning Leader will seek to resolve the situation through discussion and/or mediation.

The School considers behaviour of a complainant to be unreasonable when:

- it is clearly and significantly outside the expectations of cooperation, courtesy and respect
- it calls for staff resources and time unjustified by the nature or significance of the complaint
- an action or complaint is brought without merit, often to cause annoyance to another person
- it is oriented towards conflict.

Unreasonable complainant conduct (including vexatious complaints) will be managed in accordance with the [DOSCEL Complaints and Grievances Management Policy](#).

## **Resolution**

Where appropriate, St Thomas the Apostle may seek to resolve a complaint by:

- an apology or expression of regret
- a change of decision
- a change of policy, procedure or practice
- offering the opportunity for student counselling or other support
- other actions consistent with school values that are intended to support the student, parent, guardian, carer and school relationship, engagement, and participation in the school community.

In some circumstances, St Thomas the Apostle may also ask you to attend a meeting with an independent third party or participate in a mediation with an accredited mediator to assist in the resolution of the dispute.

## **Escalation**

If you are not satisfied that your complaint has been resolved by the school, or if your complaint is about the principal and you do not want to raise it directly with them, then the complaint should be referred to the DOSCEL Secretariat.

St Thomas the Apostle may also refer a complaint to the DOSCEL Secretariat if we believe that it is unlikely that your complaint can be resolved via our complaint-handling process.

For more information about DOSCEL's complaints process, including the role of the DOSCEL Secretariat, please see the [DOSCEL Complaints and Grievances Management Policy](#).

## **Record keeping and other requirements**

To meet DOSCEL and legal requirements, St Thomas the Apostle must keep written records of:

- all complaints received, both written and verbal, and the actions taken to resolve them.
- Complaints relating to the Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS) and Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS) and Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM), to meet regulatory requirements. For further information, see: [Information Sharing and Family Violence Reforms Contextualised Guidance](#), [Child Information Sharing Scheme Ministerial Guidelines](#), [Family Violence Information Sharing Guidelines](#), and [Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework](#)).



Our school also follows DOSCEL policy to ensure that record-keeping, reporting, privacy and employment law obligations are met when responding to complaints or concerns.

## **5.0 COMMUNICATION**

These procedures will be communicated to our school community in the following ways:

- Available publicly on our school's website
- Available through the Parent Access Module (PAM) Knowledge Banks
- Included in staff member induction processes (including volunteers and contractors)
- Discussed at staff briefings/meetings as required
- Available through the SIMON staff Knowledge Banks
- Discussed at parent information nights/sessions
- Included in transition and enrolment packs
- Included as annual reference in school newsletter
- Made available in hard copy from school administration upon request
- Communicated termly through the school newsletter

## **6.0 RELATED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

These procedures are to be read in conjunction with other related school policies, procedures, documents and codes. These include:

- Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy
- Child Safety Code of Conduct
- Parent, Guardian and Carer Code of Conduct
- Student Code of Conduct

### **Related DOSCEL policies**

- [Complaints and Grievances Management Policy](#)
- Protection of Children – Reporting Obligations Procedure
- [Protection of Children – Anti-Grooming Policy](#)
- [Protection of Children – Failure to Disclose Policy](#)
- [Protection of Children – Failure to Protect Policy](#)
- [Mandatory Reporting Policy](#)
- [Guide to Reporting Conduct under the Reportable Conduct Scheme](#)
- Child and Family Violence Information Sharing Schemes Policy and Procedure.
- Anti-Bullying and Bullying Prevention Policy (Students)
- [Privacy Policy](#)

**Other related documents**

- [The Victorian Teaching Profession Code of Conduct](#)
- Ministerial Order No. 1359, Child Safe Standards – Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools and School Boarding Facilities

**7.0 PROCEDURE STATUS AND REVIEW**

<b>Implementation Date:</b>	<b>September 2022</b>
<b>Consultation:</b>	<b>SAC – 12 September 2022</b>
<b>Approved by:</b>	<b>Principal – Kate Dourley</b>
<b>Review Date:</b>	<b>September 2025</b>
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<b>Review Date:</b>	<b>April 2026</b>