



The role of Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools (MACS) is to govern and oversee the operation of MACS schools in the fulfilment of ecclesiastical, legal and statutory requirements and Board policies and directives. All schools are empowered to manage grievances and complaints at the school level where appropriate. MACS employees at the regional and central level, provide support to manage complaints or grievances when it is not possible to resolve the complaint at the school level.

Introduction

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

Positive, clear, and effective procedures for resolving complaints between the school and community members can assist in building strong relationships, dispelling anxiety and ultimately providing students with a settled and happy learning environment.

Purpose

This policy seeks to ensure that best practice occurs for reporting, recording, managing and reviewing complaints and their outcomes. It provides surety and support for all stakeholders through what can be a difficult process.

This policy aims to ensure that MACS manages and responds to complaints in a way that:

- promotes the health, safety and wellbeing of students
- ensures consistent and fair complaint management
- improves the outcomes of complaints with a focus on collaboration and resolution
- meets its legal and regulatory obligations

Scope

This policy relates to formal complaints raised by students, parents/guardians/carers or members of school communities. It applies to all matters relating to MACS schools or the behaviour of any person within the school including employees, volunteers, contractors, families, students, subject to the below exclusions.

In the day to day running of a school, students, parents/guardians/carers may also have queries, concerns or areas requiring clarification. These matters are not considered complaints, and MACS encourages its staff to work collaboratively with students, parents/guardians/carers and members of the school community to resolve these informally with the wellbeing of the student at the centre. If a matter is unable to be resolved in this manner, then it may escalate to a complaint under this Policy and the Complaint Handling Procedure.

Matters outside scope of this policy

This policy does not relate to matters where there are existing rights (and processes) for review. This includes matters relating to fraud and corruption, legal claims, privacy, suspensions and expulsions, critical incidents, emergency management, criminal offences, the School Community Safety Order (SCSO) Scheme, the conduct of the clergy or other persons involved in religious ministry and employment matters. Please see below details for further information regarding the process for specific matters.

Misconduct or serious misconduct

All complaints of alleged misconduct or serious misconduct by a teacher, staff member or volunteers should be reported to the principal of the relevant MACS school.

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.

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 may help to determine the appropriate course of action in these circumstances.

Child abuse (including sexual offences)

Child abuse includes any instances of physical or sexual abuse (including grooming), emotional or psychological harm, serious or significant neglect and family violence involving a child.

Complaints of alleged child abuse (including sexual offences) of children or school students should be reported to the principal who will apply the MACS PROTECT – Identifying and Responding to Abuse – Reporting Obligations Policy.

There are legal obligations on all adults to report child abuse to police once a reasonable belief is formed that a sexual offence may have been committed against a child by an adult. 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.

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.

Complaints relating to reportable conduct

Legal obligations are imposed on the MACS Head of Entity 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.

Complaints relating to a reportable conduct allegation which involves a MACS employee (which amongst others, can include a teacher, principal, volunteer or contractor) must be reported.

Complaints of reportable conduct in relation to an employee (other than a principal) at a MACS primary school or MACS secondary college should be reported to the principal of the school.

Complaints of reportable conduct involving a principal at a MACS primary school or MACS secondary college should be reported to the relevant regional general manager. Further information can be found in Reportable Conduct Policy.

Complaints against the clergy or other persons involved in religious ministry

If the complaint relates to the clergy or other persons involved in religious ministry with the school, the complainant should contact and seek advice from the Professional Standards unit of the Vicar General's Office in the Archdiocese of Melbourne, 383 Albert Street, East Melbourne. Visit www.melbournecatholic.org or contact 03 9926 5677. If the person is a member of a religious order, the complainant should also contact the provincial head or professional standards office of that congregation or religious order.

Information Sharing

MACS schools are prescribed Information Sharing Entities (ISE) that may share information under the Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS) and the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS). As an ISE, the school 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.

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

- the date the complaint was made and received
- the nature of the complaint
- the action taken to resolve the complaint
- the action taken to lessen or prevent the issue from recurring
- the time taken to resolve the complaint
- further action taken if the complaint was not resolved

Anonymous complaints

MACS endeavours to address and respond to all complaints. In some situations, it may not be possible to fully address complaints that are made anonymously or without sufficient detail being provided to enable a review or resolution of the matter.

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.

If the complainant wishes to remain anonymous, an assessment will be made as to what, if any, action will be taken. Anonymous complaints will be recorded in the same manner that all other complaints are recorded.

Policy

MACS schools are committed to building a school community that features positive and respectful relationships that support the learning and development of students and value the innate dignity of each person.

MACS schools will promote the education and wellbeing of students and collaboration with their families and other members of the school community through a clear and accessible complaints process.

Positive outcomes can be achieved when everyone works together in good faith and in a respectful way.

MACS schools are committed to empowering students to participate and where possible, be a part of decision making that impacts their educational journey.

Complaints will be managed in a way that is culturally safe and sensitive to the diverse circumstances of students and their families, as well as providing support to vulnerable students and families.

Complaints will be taken seriously and responded to in a timely manner. MACS schools will abide by the principles of procedural fairness.

Providing feedback to MACS Schools

Feedback from the school community is important to MACS. There are many avenues to provide feedback to school staff outside of this policy. These include:

- annual formal parent/guardian/carer survey
- formally scheduled parent/guardian/carer feedback forums

- meetings with the principal or other staff members to express concerns
- Other avenues that are communicated through MACS schools

Roles, responsibilities and reporting

Role	Responsibility	Reporting requirement (if applicable)
Consideration of a complaint made to a MACS school	Principal may seek advice and direction from Regional General Manager	Principal to record complaints in school complaints register
Consideration of a complaint made or escalated to the MACS regional office	Regional General Manager may seek advice from other business units at MACS	Regional General Manager to enter escalated complaints into Polonious
Consideration of a complaint about a principal escalated beyond the MACS school	Regional General Manager may seek advice from other business units at MACS.	Regional General Manager to enter escalated complaints into Polonious

Who to contact to make a complaint

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

If there is any uncertainty about who to contact regarding a concern or complaint, you are encouraged to contact the college. Reception staff will arrange for contact with the appropriate leader.

If a complaint cannot be resolved by the Subject Teacher or the Class/House Mentor, the matter will escalate until it is resolved.

The Stages of Dealing with Complaints

Level	Student Learning	Student Wellbeing
Level One	Subject Teacher	Class / House Mentor
Level Two	Learning Area Team Leader	Year Level Coordinator / House Coordinator
Level Three	Director of Learning and Development	Year 9 Head of Campus / Director of Students
Level Four	Assistant Principal- Learning and Teaching	Assistant Principal - Students

For complaints of a serious nature involving school staff, the following additional information is provided.

Procedures for Complaints about Issues at De La Salle College

De La Salle College has developed and maintains a fair, effective and efficient complaints-handling procedure so that complaints about events or decisions at De La Salle College can be addressed. The following steps can guide the procedure in making a complaint about issues arising at De La Salle College.

Informal Options

Many complaints and concerns are minor in nature, or the complaint has been the result of a lack of communication or misunderstanding. Complaints of this nature are best resolved through an informal process therefore we ask that, where appropriate, complaints are initially raised directly with the relevant staff member. The following informal options could be considered:

- Self-Resolution: The parties themselves may resolve concerns in open discussion with the provision of relevant information or the clarification of issues. This option involves reflection, restorative practices and conversations respectful of each person's needs in the College.

- Supported Self-Resolution: The parties may be assisted to resolve a possible misunderstanding, miscommunication or lack of clarity about the issue in question by a support person such as a colleague, supervisor, principal, leader or counsellor providing professional advice or support.
- Facilitated Mediation: The parties may be assisted by a facilitator who is trained in mediation and/or restorative practices to identify issues, explore options and consider alternatives to find a resolution. The facilitator may be an external mediator, a senior colleague, a principal, a school leader or a counsellor.

Formal Options

In circumstances where no mutually acceptable resolution to the matter is reached through informal resolution, or in cases where the matter is considered to be serious, formal procedures can include:

- Intervention: The principal may meet with the party, or parties separately or jointly. If this does not resolve the issue then the Principal makes a decision and notifies the parties of that decision.
- Investigation: A complaint about a person concerning an alleged serious breach of legislation, school policy or procedure (e.g. student bullying, student drug and alcohol issues) may require an investigation.

Note: This process is not applicable to a complaint of a child protection nature, which must be addressed in accordance with child protection laws and reporting obligations.

Clarify the issue

- Be clear about the topic or issue to be discussed.
- Be mindful of the need to ascertain all the facts relating to the circumstances of the topic or issue.
- Think about what would be an acceptable outcome.
- Check and observe the De La Salle College Complaints Handling Policy.

Making the complaint

- Write an appropriate note or email to the relevant person (e.g. classroom teacher) outlining your concerns.
- Make an appointment to speak via phone or in person with the relevant person/s.
- Ensure the relevant person/s is given a reasonable amount of time to take the steps required to resolve or address the concerns.

Log your complaint via the [De La Salle complaints register](#).

Contact the Principal or Executive Deputy Principal

- If the issue remains unresolved after discussion with the relevant person/s at the college, request an appointment, through the De La Salle College office, to discuss the concern with the principal or the executive deputy principal.

Expectations of and Information for Parents/Guardians/Carers

In making a complaint, De La Salle College requests and expects that the complainant will:

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

If your concern/complaint relates to your treatment or your son's treatment by another student, students or family member while at De La Salle College, we expect that you will refer your complaint directly to the college, via your son's class teacher or staff listed in the [Stages of Dealing with Complaints](#) table. Under no circumstances should you approach another student in the care of the college to discuss the issue or chastise them. Direct contact with parents/guardians/carers to resolve the matter is also discouraged if the complaint pertains to issues or incidents that have arisen at the college.

Parents/guardians/carers making complaints are to be respectful, confidential and courteous. Parents/guardians/carers who are unreasonable, threatening or discourteous can expect their discussions with the Principal to be terminated until such time as an alternative discussion time is arranged by the College.

Process for Dealing with Complaints

The College will record the details of all complaints including the name and contact details of the persons making the complaint. The college will then refer the complaint to the most appropriate person to undertake an inquiry. 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/guardian/carer to discuss the matter further.

If the scope of the inquiry is beyond the capacity or jurisdiction of the College, the matter will be referred to the MACS Regional General Manager and the parent/guardian/carer will be informed of the referral.

Parents/guardians/carers discussing complaints with the principal may be accompanied by a support person. The support person can be a family member, a friend or a professional with knowledge of the student. Any person acting in a professional capacity on behalf of the parents/guardians/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 school meeting.

The support person may encourage and facilitate sharing of parent/guardian/carer knowledge, perception and issues. The support person should support a positive working relationship between all parties. The support person does not speak on behalf of parents/guardians/carers when discussing complaints with the principal.

Any inquiry conducted by the College will be done so in a timely, efficient and confidential manner, ensuring the fair principles on natural justice are applied for all. Parents/guardians/carers will be provided with an anticipated timeframe for a resolution. The staff member conducting the inquiry will record the details of the inquiry.

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.

The school will ensure that all records are maintained in accordance with its obligations under the [Public Record Office Victoria Recordkeeping Standards](#).

Recordkeeping obligations

When handling all complaints, MACS regional offices and all MACS schools will keep and maintain any records as required in accordance with Information and Records Management Policy and Procedures Retention and Disposal Schedules for MACS schools and MACS offices and any legally applicable [Public Record Office Victoria Recordkeeping Standards](#).

Definitions

Complaint

A formal expression of dissatisfaction with an action taken, decision made, service provided or handling of an issue.

Complainant

The person or persons who have raised a complaint with the MACS office.

Head of entity

In accordance with section 3 of the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic.), the head of an organisation is the person who is "primarily responsible for an organisation's compliance with the Reportable Conduct Scheme. Except for in limited circumstances, the head of entity will be the chief executive officer of the entity (however described) or if there is no chief executive officer, the principal officer of the entity (however described) or if there is no chief executive officer or principal officer, a person or position nominated by the entity and approved by the Commission for Children and Young People".

Melbourne Catholic Archdiocese Schools Ltd (MACS)

MACS is a reference to Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools Ltd, and / or its subsidiaries, MACSS and/or MACSEYE (as the context requires).

MACS office

Staff employed in MACS offices at James Goold House, Catholic Leadership Centre and MACS regional offices.

Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Specialist Schools Ltd (MACSS)

Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Specialist Schools Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary of MACS established to conduct and operate specialist schools.

Related policies and documents

Supporting documents

Complaints Handling Policy – Template for Schools Complaints Handling Procedures – Template for Schools Complaints Initial Contact Form – Template for Schools Acknowledgement of Complaint – Template for Schools Complaint Outcome – Template for Schools

Related MACS policies and documents

Anti-bullying policy (including cyberbullying)
Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy
Code of Conduct – Parent / Guardian / Carer
Code of Conduct – Students
Privacy Policy
Complaints Handling Procedures
PROTECT – Identifying and Responding to Abuse – Reporting Obligations Policy
Reportable Conduct Policy
Community Safety Order Scheme Internal Review Process
Suspension of Students Policy
Expulsion of Students Policy
Whistleblower Policy

Legislation and standards

Crimes Act 1958

Guidelines to the Minimum Standards and Requirements for School Registration

Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005

Policy information table

Responsible director	Director, Governance, Legal and Compliance
Procedure owner	General Manager, Legal and Professional Standards
Approving authority	Executive Director
Assigned board committee	Child Safety and Risk Management
Approval date	October 2023
Risk rating	High
Date of next review	June 2025
Publication details	CEVN, MACS office website

POLICY DATABASE INFORMATION

Assigned framework	Complaints Handling and Complex Issues Framework
Related documents	See list above
Superseded documents	Complaints Handling Policy for MACS Schools - v3.0 - 2022 Complaints Handling Policy for MACS Schools – v2.0 – 2022
New policy	Complaints Handling for Schools Policy – v1.0 – 2021