

PROCEDURE FOR MANAGEMENT OF COMPLAINTS

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This document outlines the procedures to make a complaint and how to manage complaints for:

- **Schools, colleges, outside hours school care and other facilities/programs** in the Townsville Catholic Education system.

Townsville Catholic Education will adopt the principles of procedural fairness and natural justice throughout the complaint management process. This requires a fair and proper procedure to be used, which involves disclosure, a reasonable opportunity to respond and impartiality to reach a fair and correct decision.

It is important that all complaints:

- Are handled in a positive and transparent way.
- Are recorded at every level, properly documented and reported to the Principal or delegated person as soon as practicable. Documents related to the complaint are kept and stored in accordance with Townsville Catholic Education Office procedures.
- Can be made directly to the Principal of the school/college or to Townsville Catholic Education Office if the complaint involves a Principal.
- Are resolved with mutual respect and clear communication.
- Where possible, are resolved at the first point of contact. If this does not occur the receipt of the complaint will be acknowledged within five working days by telephone, in person, by email, or in writing.

Complaints management in schools is also underpinned by section 7 of the [Education Accreditation \(Non-State Schools\) Act Qld, and Regulations 2017](#).

1. Procedure for people making a complaint

During the course of a child's school years, a parent/carer, student or other persons may have cause to make a complaint about school decisions, processes, management, conduct of staff and/or students, or have other general concerns.

Step 1: Discuss the complaint with the class teacher (Resolve at the first level)

If a complaint is with the child's teacher or relates to an issue concerning the child's experience at school, make an appointment with that teacher as soon as possible through the school administration. Discuss the complaint with the teacher and give the teacher an opportunity to suggest a solution. The teacher will make a record of the complaint and report the meeting and any outcomes to the school Principal. Together, parents/carers and teachers should be able to resolve the problem at this level.

Step 2: Discuss the complaint with the Principal (Seek support to resolve a complaint)

If the complaint remains unresolved, make an appointment to see the school Principal or their delegate to discuss the issue further. Alternatively, a parent/carer and the teacher may agree to ask the Principal to act as a go-between in informal conflict resolution in an attempt to resolve the problem.

If the complaint relates to more general school matters, the complaint should be raised directly with the Principal or their delegate. The Principal may refer the complaint to a delegate such as the Deputy Principal. Complaints to the Principal can be lodged in person, by telephone, writing or via email. Principals' email addresses are available on the Townsville Catholic Education Office website www.tsv.catholic.edu.au

Complaints about a Principal should be directed to an Education Consultant or Director Leadership & School Development at the Townsville Catholic Education Office. (See contact details below)

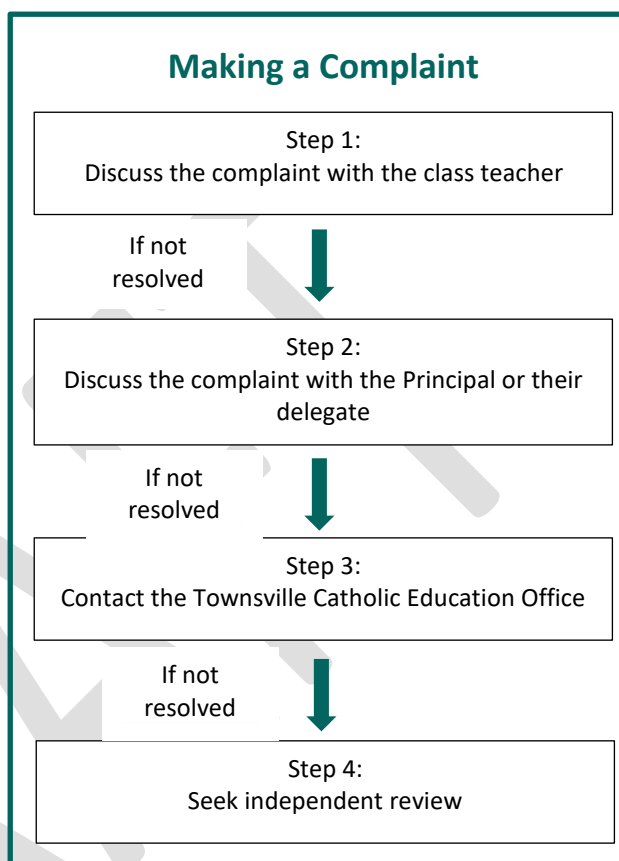
Step 3: Contact Townsville Catholic Education Office (Refer the matter to an external source)

If the complaint has been discussed with the Principal and is still not resolved, please contact the Townsville Catholic Education Office. Complaints may be lodged by telephone, email or in writing. The name of the complainant and the nature of the complaint will be reported back to the Principal. Townsville Catholic Education Office staff will then work with all parties to seek a resolution.

Anonymous complaints will be acted upon if enough information has been provided to allow for follow-up with the relevant school Principal.

Townsville Catholic Education Office

Phone: (07) 4773 0900 Email: director@tsv.catholic.edu.au



Step 4: Independent review (Seeking external intervention)

If the complaint is not resolved through these formal processes, it can be lodged with the Non-State School Accreditation Board.

Chairperson, Non-State Schools Accreditation Board Email
chair@nssab.qld.edu.au Telephone (07) 3513 6773 or
PO Box 15347 CITY EAST QLD 4002

Please note, when following the complaint process:

- a) At every level of the complaint process, a record will be made of the complaint.
- b) To achieve an effective resolution for all parties, when making a complaint, parents/carers should ensure they:
 - provide complete and factual information in a timely manner, **preferably in writing**
 - deliver a complaint in a calm and reasoned manner
 - avoid making frivolous or vexatious complaints
 - avoid using deliberately false, incomplete or misleading information
 - Include full contact details of the complainant.
- c) In most instances, in the case of a complaint about a staff member, the staff member will be told of the complaint and offered the right of reply.
- d) All parties have the right to have a support person throughout the process.
- e) Matters involving harm and abuse will be referred to the appropriate authorities including Police in accordance with the *Diocesan Education Council Student Protection Policy*.

2. Complaints Management Procedure – Schools and Colleges

Schools and Colleges must ensure that all complaints and concerns are recorded, assessed, investigated and dealt with in a procedurally fair and equitable manner. There are five key phases in handling a complaint.

Special Circumstances

- If the complaint relates to a report about harm (whether physical/emotional/sexual) of a student under 18 years attending a Townsville Diocese School, refer to the *Townsville Catholic Education Student Protection Processes and Diocesan Education Council Student Protection Policy* for detailed obligations of all Townsville Catholic Education Office employees.
- If the complaint relates to a potential breach of the Privacy Act, schools/colleges should refer to the *Diocesan Education Council Privacy Policy and Townsville Catholic Education Procedures for Responding to Privacy Breaches and Complaints*.
- Conflict amongst staff members is to be addressed according to the *Townsville Catholic Education Grievance Dispute Procedure*.

Phase 1 - Receiving and clarifying the complaint

Any member of staff can receive a complaint. All complaints should be received in the following manner:

- being respectful and helpful and remaining positive
- giving the person undivided attention
- not being defensive, apportioning blame
- not perceiving anger as a personal attack.

All details are confidential.

When a staff member receives a verbal complaint they:

- listen carefully to the issues being raised
- summarise the issues to clarify and check that they understand what the complainant is telling you
- empathise and acknowledge the complainant's feelings
- find out what the complainant wants to happen as a result of the complaint
- tell the complainant that they may use the support of a third party in progressing the complaint, if they feel this is needed
- resolve the complaint if possible, or assure the complainant that an appropriate staff member will address their complaint
- advise the complainant what will happen with their complaint
- thank them for their complaint.

Complaints are sometimes made with the assistance of an advocate, interpreter or by a third party (as agreed between the complainant and the Principal).

Many complaints are resolved at the first point of contact with information and/or an explanation, together with an apology and recognition of the effect the situation has had on the person. Some complainants may also want an undertaking that action will be taken to prevent the problem recurring. When the complaint is not resolved immediately, the complaint is referred to the Principal as soon as is practicable. A member of staff who receives a verbal complaint that is not resolved informs the complainant of the further options of:

- putting their complaint in writing, or
- assisting the member of staff to record, in writing, the particulars of their complaint.

The record of the complaint should:

- use objective language clearly stating the facts
- contain information in chronological order as practically possible, including dates and times
- use quotation marks, where appropriate and necessary
- be neatly and legibly written in pen or typed in clear unambiguous language
- include, where necessary, initialled and dated corrections
- include signature, designation of the author, and time and date of the incident/complaint contact phone or email address.

In general, if the complainant agrees to put the complaint in writing, the member of staff takes no further action unless or until a written complaint is received.

Once the complainant indicates that they would like to register a formal complaint verbally, the member of staff makes a written outline of the issues concerned. The record is read to the complainant, with opportunity for appropriate amendments and the complainant is asked to sign, where possible, the written version of the complaint. The staff member also signs (indicating their personal designation, for example, 'Year 6 Teacher, XYZ School') and dates the complaint.

No signature is required for verbal complaints taken over the phone, but the complainant is asked to provide verbal confirmation of the issues that have been recorded and a contact phone or email address.

If a complainant refuses to sign or confirm a written recording of a verbal complaint, the staff member notes the refusal on the written complaint. The complainant is told that this refusal will be noted and that the process will be reliant on the staff member's interpretation and notes only.

Receiving a written complaint

When a written complaint is received it is date-stamped and forwarded to the Principal.

Receiving an anonymous complaint

When an anonymous complaint is received, the complainant is told of the possible limitations associated with making an anonymous complaint including no action at all if there is insufficient detail to conduct an investigation. If the anonymous complaint is received in writing – date stamp and forward to the Principal

Phase 2 - Deciding how to handle the complaint

When a staff member receives a complaint:

- if they are not the Principal, refer the complainant or the complaint to the Principal (or delegate eg Deputy Principal) for addressing
- begin the process of making an assessment about a complaint from the moment the complaint is received
- make an assessment in the first instance about whether the issue can be dealt with as a concern or a complaint.

The Principal decides whether to:

- take no further action
- attempt to resolve the complaint through resolution strategies such as mediation
- refer the complaint to the relevant internal or external agency if required, or follow other procedures such as *the Townsville Catholic Education Procedure for complaints about breaches of the Privacy Act*.
- initiate an investigation of the complaint, within the school, if further information is required
- note discussion to act on complaint or not to act with the Education Consultant.

Co-ordination of complaints

The Principal has the final responsibility for the management of all complaints that relate to school management issues under his/her jurisdiction. The complaint can be referred to another staff member in the school for action (for example, the Deputy Principal, Business Manager or nominated staff member). If the complaint relates to Townsville Catholic Education policy, the complainant is advised to take their complaint to the Townsville Catholic Education Office. If the complaint relates to a potential breach of the Privacy Act, schools/colleges should refer to the *Diocesan Education*

Record of complaint

The Principal ensures that records of a complaint and any referral of a complaint are kept for either internal or external review.

Phase 3 - Finding out about the complaint

The Principal or delegate gathers all the necessary facts about the complaint while keeping in mind the principles of natural justice for all parties concerned.

The Principal or delegate investigates complaints by:

- collecting and analysing information relevant to the matter
- working collaboratively with all people involved
- finding the facts relating to the matter
- identifying any contributing factors to the matter
- in some instances consulting the Townsville Catholic Education Office Education Consultant on issues that relate to the complaint
- documenting the investigation report or outcome.

Phase 4 - Making a decision about the complaint

Based on the facts gathered in Phase 3 about the complaint, the Principal or delegate makes a decision on the complaint. Based on this decision, the Principal will take appropriate action.

Within 28 days of the receipt of the complaint, the Principal provides the complainant with either:

- a written response, including reasons for the decision,
- a written notification that their complaint has been referred to an internal or external agency, or
- an update on the progress of the investigation.

Phase 5 - Review

If the complainant is not satisfied with this response, they are encouraged to discuss it further with the school Principal and/or advised to contact the [Townsville Catholic Education Office](#). The complainant may take the matter to the [Non-State Schools Accreditation Board](#) (NSSAB).

This Procedure for Management of Complaints will be made readily available to all staff, students parents, carers and the general public on all school websites.

Complaints Management Procedure Chart For Townsville Catholic Education Schools

