


St Thomas The Apostle Primary School	Updated: 26. 06. 2017	
Grievance & Complaints Policy	Next Review: 26. 06. 2019	

Grievance and Complaints Policy

Introduction

At St Thomas the Apostle School we believe that positive relationships existing between staff, students, parents and community groups is an essential part in ensuring that students are happy, secure and open to learning.

We understand that due to the nature of school communities, issues of conflict, misunderstanding and grievances are inevitable. However, we also acknowledge that all people in our school have both a desire and a responsibility to ensure that high standards of conduct are maintained by staff, students and families at all times, and that complaints are managed and resolved fairly, efficiently, promptly and in accordance with the relative legislation and in the spirit of the Catholic Ethos.


Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Provide a harmonious, positive and productive school environment.
- To resolve complaints fairly, efficiently
- To provide people in the process of deciding and/or making a complaint.
- To treat all issues and complaints with respect and dignity responding in accordance with the Gospel values that we espouse.

Scope/Implementation:

1. It is the principal's responsibility to provide a healthy and positive school environment that is free from discrimination and harassment. In doing so, Principal's must ensure that all staff are aware of their rights and responsibilities.
2. It is also the role of the Principal to provide and communicate a pathway in which people within the school and local community may take their grievance or complaint within a safe and caring environment and process.
3. The principal is required to use local complaints resolution procedures, where appropriate, for resolving complaints in relation to issues that fall within the school's area of responsibility. All cases of serious misconduct – sexual offences, criminal charges, other serious incidents – must instead be referred to the CEOM (Catholic Education Office Melbourne.)Where appropriate other external agencies such Catholic Education Office Melbourne, Victorian Institute of teaching, the Victorian Equal Opportunity Commission, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission or the Ombudsman may be sought. Also offences will be understood in light of the recent legislation in child safety.
4. Complaints usually fall into a minor or major category and can be dealt with informally or formally.
5. All complaints, grievances, concerns will be attended to & investigated and addressed.
6. The principal may choose to respond to a complaint through an informal process in cases where the complaint is minor or the complainant wishes the matter to be dealt with informally, or the complaint has arisen from lack of or unclear communication.
7. Formal processes will be used when informal processes haven't been successful, a complainant seeks a formal process, or the principal believes the complaint warrants formal investigation.
8. It is important that all complaints, ensuing procedures and outcomes are fully documented.

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9. Complaints are treated with the utmost confidentiality and should only be discussed by those responsible for handling them. They should **NEVER** be the subject of casual conversation or gossip.

10. Full details regarding formal complaint resolution procedures are contained within the DEET 'Local Complaints Resolution Procedures' handbook, and contain the following steps.

The formal process involves:

- Investigating the complaint including formal interviews, written statements, conveying the details of the complaint to the respondent in writing providing the opportunity for a written response.
- Dismissing or accepting the complaint. Acceptance may involve the CEOM, verbal or written warnings, conciliation, or counselling etc.
- Preparation of a detailed confidential report.
- Monitoring of the situation.
- Parties dissatisfied with the process can appeal to the external agencies noted above.

All matters must be treated with utmost confidentiality, and professional respect at all times.


11. The process for making a complaint for staff, students, parents and the local community groups is outlined in the appendices and made available to all. These documents are intended to support and guide people who wish to lodge a complaint.

12. It is the policy of the school that anonymous complaints will not be acted upon, as well as complaints that request that nominated person/s of complaint are not to be contacted.

13. It is not the role of the Parish Education Board or School Community Association, to deal directly with complaints relating to students, staff, parents or the general educational & administrative running of the school. Such issues must be directed to the person in concern or responsible for this area. However suggestions an improvement ideas may be forwarded to such committees that fall within the committees function.

APPENDICIES

1. Complaints handling procedures information for parents
2. Complaints handling procedures information for students
3. Complaints handling procedures information for staff
4. Complaints handling procedures information for community and parish members
5. Complaint procedures summary & Formal Complaint Form

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Section 1


COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURES - Information for Parents

At St Thomas the Apostle, we believe that the relationship between the home and the school is a very important part of ensuring that children are happy, secure and open to learning. We recognise that parents and teachers need to work closely together to provide the best educational opportunities for their children. We encourage you to discuss your child's progress with his/her teacher and to let us know if you have any concerns so that we might work together to resolve these as promptly and effectively as we can.

We also acknowledge that all adults have the joint responsibility in modelling to our students appropriate manner and behaviour in our relationship with each other, upholding the school's Catholic identity and ethos and instilling the Christian values we want for our students.

What to do if you have a problem:

- Try to identify the problem clearly before contacting the school. If there is more than one problem, list them to ensure that the extent of the problem is clear.
- Decide whether the problem is a concern, enquiry or complaint. This will help in finding a solution.
- Make an appointment to meet with your child's class teacher or staff member in concern. The best way to do this is to contact the teacher to arrange a mutually convenient time for a meeting. This way will allow for the most appropriate place, time and thought processes needed for discussion in order to achieve a successful outcome.
- Do not tackle your complaint arriving at the school unannounced without an appointment. If this is not possible, or in the event of an urgent or emergency situation please report to the school office to seek assistance.
- If you do not feel after your meeting that the matter has been resolved make an appointment to meet with the Deputy Principal.
- If your complaint is about the teacher or another staff member, it is in the best interest of resolving the matter quickly to meet and speak directly with this person about your concern. Alternately, you may make an appointment to meet with the Deputy Principal or Principal.
- If a complaint is made against a person, that person will be informed of the nature and content of the complaint and have the right to respond.
- Anonymous complaints will not be acted upon nor requests that the person in concern not be notified.
- Try to stay calm when discussing your concern. Even if you don't feel it, being calm will help you get your concerns across more clearly than if you are upset or angry.
- You should refrain from speaking directly to another child or parent over student conflict, but rather bring to the matter to the attention of the teacher.
- Remember, the staff are committed to resolving any issues that parents might have regarding their children and will discuss with you actions that might be taken in regard to your concern.
- It is important that issues be brought to the attention of the teacher as soon as possible in order to achieve a satisfactory and timely outcome. Leaving an issue can make things worse and very difficult to resolve if at all.
- If you still do not feel that the matter has been resolved or if your complaint is about a very serious (legal) matter, send your complaint in writing to the Principal.
- If this does not resolve the issue send your complaint in writing to the Regional Manager for our school (Regional Catholic Education Melbourne) or to the Parish Priest. Mediation may be sought to bring about a resolution.

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- If matters still remain unresolved you have the right to seek arbitration through the courts, ombudsman, legal representation and other government commissions such as Human Rights Commission etc. These might entail some financial cost to you.

Note:

Mediation is an option at any stage of the process, if the complainant and the person to whom the complaint is directed so agree. Normally, mediation is facilitated by the Senior School Leadership, School Consultant or if necessary the Parish Priest.

When you make a complaint:

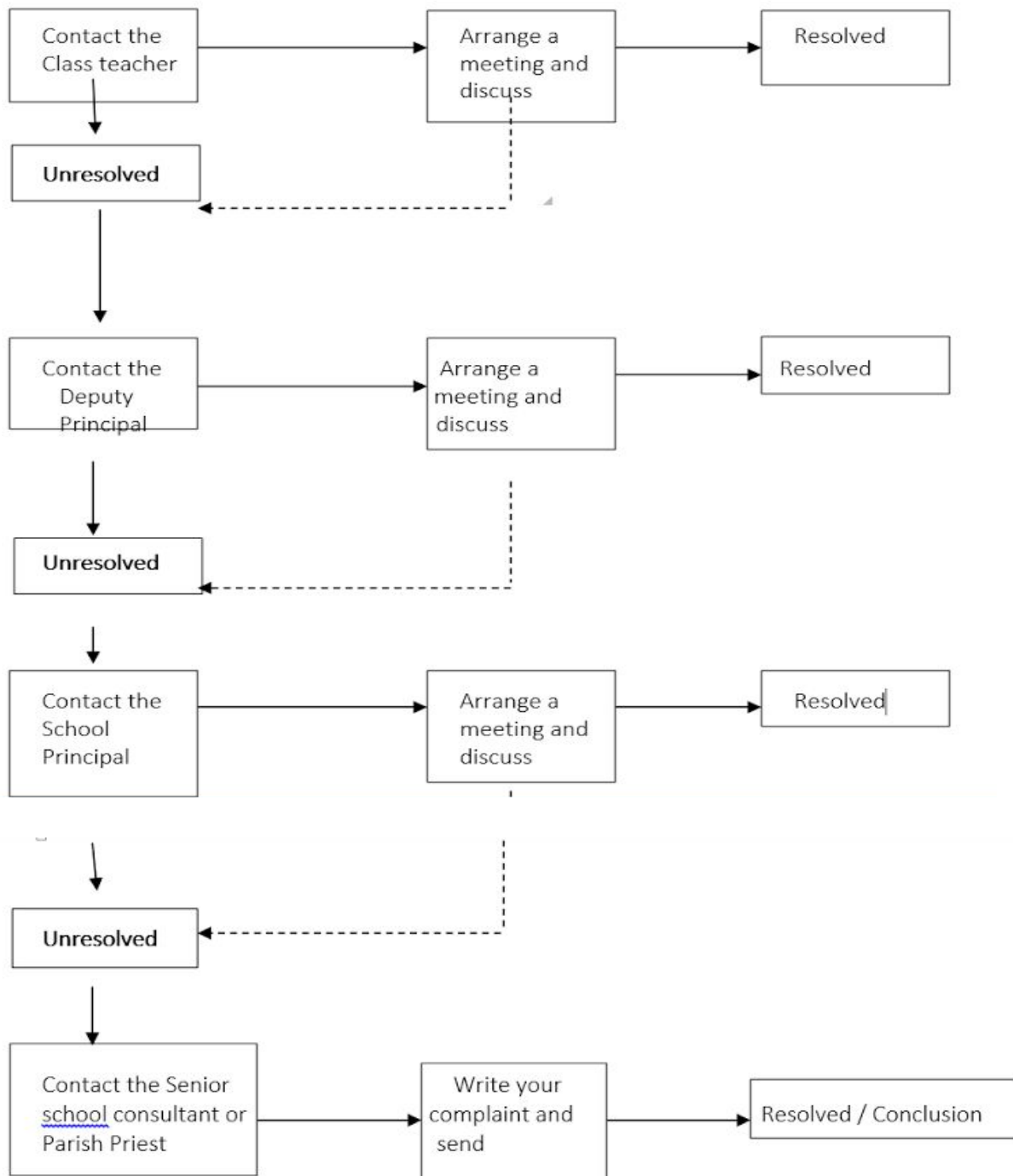
If a complaint is made against a person, that person will be informed of the nature and content of the complaint and have the right to respond.

- Discussions of complaints must remain confidential to those directly involved.
- Complaints may be made verbally or in writing (pro-forma available from front office)
- All complaints, the actions taken to resolve them and outcomes of those actions will be fully documented.
- A person who has made a complaint may withdraw it at any time. If the complaint is in writing, the withdrawal should also be in writing.
- No one will be victimised as a result of taking out a formal complaint.
- At the formal stage, a person who has made a complaint has the right to be represented and supported by another person of his/her choice as a support person
- A process of mediation may be available if a complaint is not satisfactorily resolved.
- Anonymous complaints will not be acted upon nor requests that other/s not be notified

NB: School and Parish committees are not vehicles to address a complaint relating to individual staff, students, families nor the educational and administrative running of the school.



FLOW CHART FOR PARENTS MAKING COMPLAINTS



If matters still remain unresolved you have the right to seek arbitration through the courts, ombudsman, legal representation and other government commissions such as the Human rights Commission etc. These might entail some financial cost to you.

Mediation is an option at any stage of the process, if the complainant and the person to whom the complaint is directed so agree. Normally, mediation is facilitated by the Senior School Leadership, Parish Priest or Consultant.

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Section 2

COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURES - Information for Students

At St Thomas the Apostle, we believe that it is important that everyone feels happy and safe at school so that the best learning can take place. We believe that everyone, staff and students, need to work closely together to provide the best educational opportunities for you. If you have a problem, a concern or a complaint, we encourage you to speak to someone about it and we have provided some steps that you might work through to help you do this.

What to do if you have a problem:

- Try to identify the problem that is upsetting you. If there is more than one problem, list them so that you are clear about what you feel or need.
- If you feel you can, talk to the person you are having the problem with and if their behaviour is upsetting you, tell them to stop.
- Often parents can help when young people are unsure of what to do. It is a good idea to ask for support and advice when problems arise rather than keep it all to yourself.
- If your talk with the person you are having the problem with does not solve your problem, talk to a teacher about your concerns and ask them to help you deal with it. Your teacher will often be able to give you good ideas on how to cope with it and will help you. You should explain:
 - Who was involved
 - What happened
 - What you did
 - What you believe was unfair or unjust
- Try to stay calm when discussing your problem or concern. Even if you don't feel it, being calm will help you get your concerns across more clearly than if you are upset or angry. It may help to take someone with you.
- Work with the teacher to decide what should be done to help you.
- If you still do not feel that the matter has been solved, talk to the Deputy Principal.
- If you still do not feel that the matter has been solved, make a time to talk to the Principal about your concern.

Remember:

- Sometimes the person helping you will need to speak to someone else so that the problem can be solved. You need to let that person know that you are OK about that.
- You can bring a friend, parent or a teacher to support you when you need to talk about the problem.
- No one will be allowed to pick on you or hurt you because you made a complaint.
- If you want to, you can write out your complaint in a letter instead of talking about it, but the person helping you will need to speak to you later.

NB: It is expected that teachers explain the process outlined above to students on a regular basis and in language that is 'age' appropriate.




A STUDENT'S GUIDE TO MAKING A COMPLAINT



If matters still remain unresolved you have the same rights and access to external support groups as your parents noted in the parent information section of the complaints policy.

Mediation is an option at any stage of the process, if the complainant and the person to whom the complaint is directed so agree.

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Section 3

COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURES - Information for Staff


At St Thomas the Apostle, we believe that the relationship between colleagues is a very important part of ensuring that children are happy, secure and open to learning. We recognise that all staff need to work closely together to provide the best educational opportunities for the students in our care. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding any other member of the school community, we strongly encourage you to work together to resolve these as promptly and effectively as we can.

What to do if you have a problem:

- Try to identify the problem clearly before taking any action. If there is more than one problem, list them to ensure that the extent of the problem is clear.
- Decide whether the problem is a concern, enquiry or complaint. This will help in finding a solution.
- In the interests of resolving matters quickly and effectively, you are encouraged to informally discuss your concern/complaint with the person concerned.
- If a complaint is made against a person, that person will be informed of the nature and content of the complaint and have the right to respond
- If informal strategies do not resolve the issue, make your complaint to the Principal. Where the Principal advises, mediation can be arranged between the parties concerned on their mutual agreement.
- If you still do not feel that the matter has been resolved, make your complaint formally and in writing to the Principal and arrange for an appointment to further discuss your concerns.
- If you still do not feel that the matter has been resolved and or if your complaint is serious, telephone or send your complaint in writing to the Parish Priest or Senior School Consultant for SFX or Union if applicable, who will then contact you and make arrangements for you to discuss your complaints.
- If matters still remain unresolved you have the right to seek arbitration through the courts, ombudsman, legal representation and other government commissions such as Workplace Safety, Anti-Discrimination and Human Rights Commissions These might entail some financial cost to you.

Note:

Mediation is an option at any stage of the process, if the complainant and the person to whom the complaint is directed so agree. Normally, mediation is facilitated by the School Principal or Senior School Consultant. Industrial issues may involve Union representatives.

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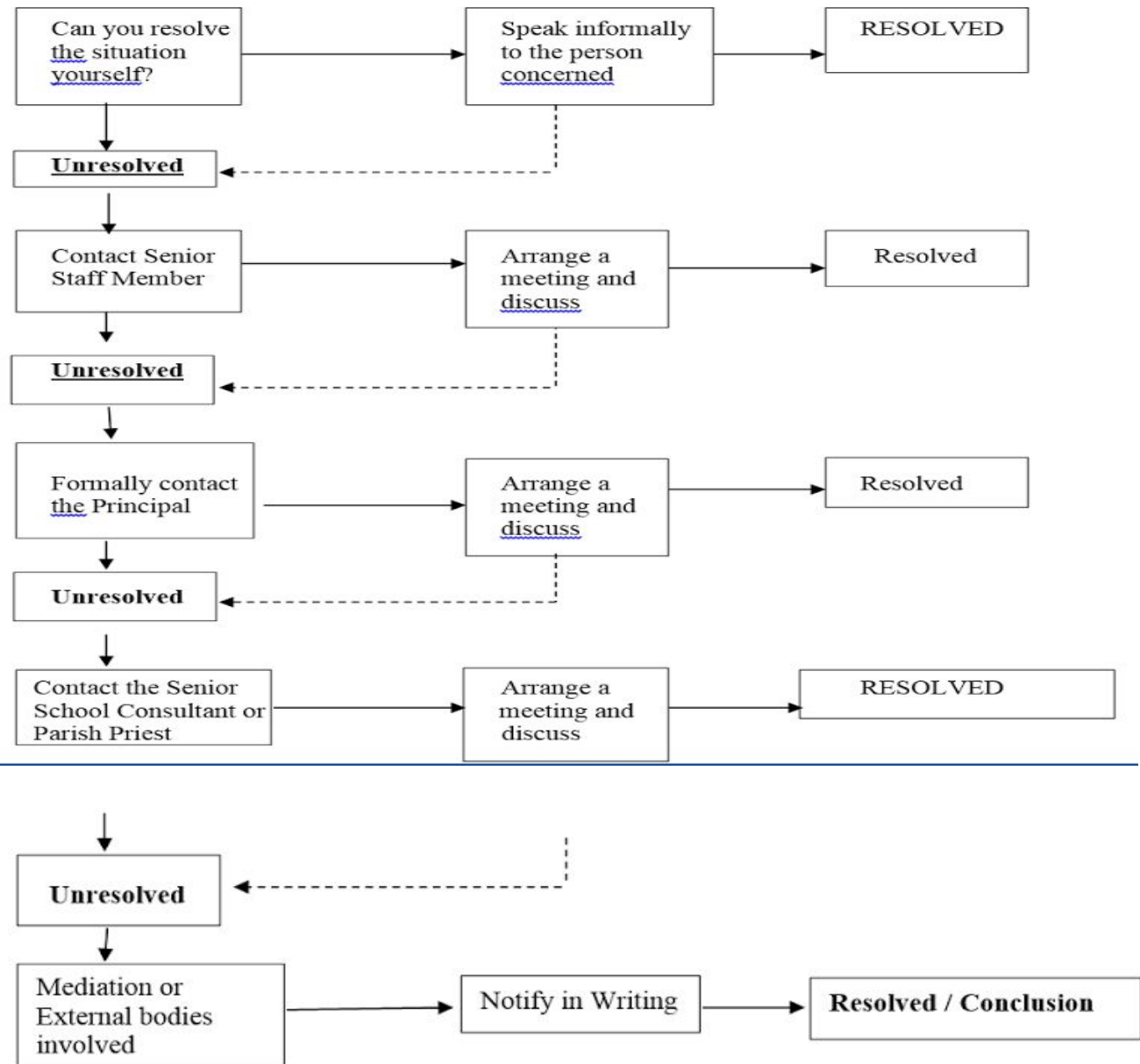
When you decide to make a complaint:

If a complaint is made against a person, that person will be informed of the nature and content of the complaint and have the right to respond.

- Discussions of complaints must remain confidential to those directly involved.
- Complaints may be made verbally or in writing
- All complaints, the actions taken to resolve them and outcomes of those actions will be fully documented.
- A person who has made a complaint may withdraw it at any time. If the complaint is in writing, the withdrawal should also be in writing.
- No one will be victimised as a result of taking out a formal grievance.
- At the formal stage, a person who has made a complaint has the right to be represented and supported by another person eg his/her union, work colleague, friend or other person of his/her choice as a support person
- A process of mediation may be available if a complaint is not satisfactorily resolved.
- Anonymous complaints will not be acted upon nor requests that other/s not be notified
- NB: School and Parish committees are not vehicles to address a complaint relating to individual staff, students, families nor the educational and administrative running of the school.




FLOW CHART FOR MAKING COMPLAINTS – STAFF



If matters still remain unresolved you have the right to seek arbitration through the courts, ombudsman, legal representation and other government commissions such as the Human Rights Commission etc. These might entail some financial cost to you.

Mediation is an option at any stage of the process, if the complainant and the person to whom the complaint is directed so agree. Normally, mediation is facilitated by the Senior School Consultant.

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Section 4

COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURES - Information for Community

At St Thomas the Apostle School, we believe that open, friendly and constructive relationships with our community are vital to our growth and the good of the community.

At times however, people or groups within the local and broader community have issues, concerns or complaints about the school. When such matters arise the issue/s must be brought to the attention of the School Principal or Parish Priest.

What to do if you have a concern or problem:

- Try to identify the problem clearly before contacting the school. If there is more than one problem, list them to ensure that the extent of the matter is clear to the school.
- Decide whether the problem is a concern, enquiry or complaint. This will help in finding a solution.
- Make an appointment to meet with the Deputy Principal or Principal. The best way to do this is to contact the school office to arrange a mutually convenient time for a telephone call or meeting.
- After this initial contact, if you do not feel that the matter has been resolved or if your complaint is about a serious matter, send your complaint in writing to the Principal.
- If this does not resolve the issue, send your complaint in writing to the Parish Priest or Senior School Consultant at the Regional Catholic Education Office.
- If matters still remain unresolved you have the right to seek arbitration through the courts, ombudsman, legal representation and other government commissions such as Human Rights Commission etc. These might entail some financial cost to you.

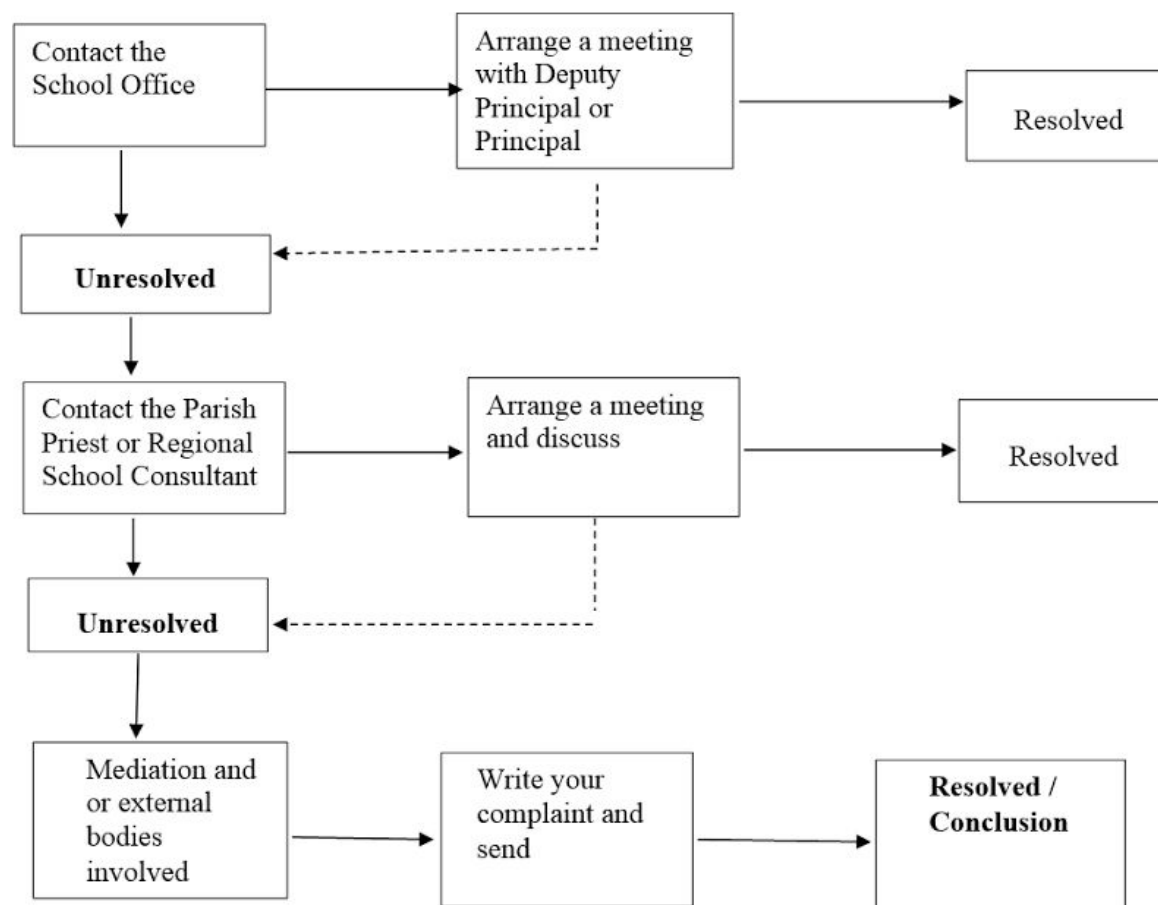
Note:

Mediation is an option at any stage of the process, if the complainant and the person to whom the complaint is directed so agree. Normally, mediation is facilitated by the Principal and /or the Senior School Consultant.

- If a complaint is made against a person, that person will be informed of the nature and content of the complaint and have the right to respond.
- Discussions of complaints must remain confidential to those directly involved.
- Complaints may be made verbally or in writing.
- All complaints, the actions taken to resolve them and outcomes of those actions will be fully documented.
- A person who has made a complaint may withdraw it at any time. If the complaint is in writing, the withdrawal should also be in writing.
- No one will be victimised as a result of lodging a formal grievance.
- At the formal stage, a person who has made a complaint has the right to be represented and supported by another person of his/her choice as a support person.
- A process of mediation may be available if a complaint is not satisfactorily resolved.
- Anonymous complaints will not be acted upon nor requests for those the complaint is made against not to be contacted.
- NB: School and Parish committees are not vehicles to address a complaint relating to individual staff, students, families nor the educational and administrative running of the school.

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FLOW CHART FOR MAKING COMPLAINTS - COMMUNITY



If matters still remain unresolved you have the right to seek arbitration through the courts, ombudsman, legal representation and other government commissions such as the Human Rights Commission etc. These might entail some financial cost to you.

Mediation is an option at any stage of the process, if the complainant and the person to whom the complaint is directed so agree. Normally, mediation is facilitated by Principal and or the Senior School Consultant.

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FORMAL COMPLAINT FORM

This form may be used to assist when lodging a formal complaint.

Please complete this form and return to the Principal. A letter of acknowledgement will be sent to you and will inform you of the next step in the complaints process.

Your details:

First Name:	Surname:
Relationship with the school, (eg Parent, Staff, student, neighbour etc):	
Your address:	Phone (work):
	Phone (home):
	Mobile:
	Email:

Details of your complaint:

(Please include all the information you can eg witnesses, dates, events etc. If you need, you can add extra pages or attach any documentation that you believe is relevant) **And the action(s) you have already taken to resolve the problem** (eg who you have spoken to, what you said and what was done etc.)

Your signature: **Date:**

For school use only:


Date form received: Received by:

Date acknowledgement sent:

Acknowledgement sent by:

Complaint referred to:

Date:

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SECTION 5

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURES: SUMMARY

STUDENTS	PARENTS	STAFF	COMMUNITY
<p>1. If you feel you can, talk to the person who is upsetting you and tell them to stop.</p> <p>2. If you cannot do this or if the person does not listen, talk to your parent(s) and/or a teacher you trust and ask them to help you work through the problem.</p> <p>3. If the problem is still not worked out, talk to the Deputy Principal, telling him/her everything you have done so far and ask for his/her help.</p> <p>4. If the problem remains, make an appointment to speak to the Principal about your complaint.</p> <p><i>Remember:</i> often parents can help when young people are unsure of what to do. It is a good idea to ask for support and advice when problems arise rather than keep it all to yourself.</p>	<p>1. Arrange a time through the school office to speak to the person concerned. Remember, if the concern is about your child, the class teacher is the first person you should talk to about the problem.</p> <p>2. If this does not resolve your concern, make an appointment to discuss your concerns with the Deputy Principal.</p> <p>3. If unresolved discuss the matter with the Principal</p> <p>4. Only after you have discussed the issues with the Principal, should you contact the Parish Priest or Senior School Consultant at the Catholic Education Office and make a time to discuss complaints or concerns with him/her.</p> <p>5. If the matter remains unresolved, your complaint should be made in writing to external agencies or mediation can be arranged.</p>	<p>1. Speak to the person concerned informally and privately.</p> <p>2. If unresolved contact a senior school leader</p> <p>3. If this does not resolve the issue, make an appointment to take your grievance to the Principal. If deemed appropriate, mediation at this stage may be arranged at the mutual agreement of all involved.</p> <p>4. If still unresolved, contact the Parish Priest, Union or contact the Senior School Consultant for your school either by telephone or in writing. He/she will then make arrangements to meet with you.</p> <p>5. If these actions do not resolve you have the right to seek mediation, arbitration through the courts, relevant Government commissions or the Ombudsman</p>	<p>1. Contact the School Office to arrange a meeting with the Deputy Principal or Principal.</p> <p>2. If this does not resolve the issue, contact the Parish Priest or Senior School Consultant for the School either by telephone or in writing. He/she will then make arrangements to meet with you.</p> <p>5. If these actions do not resolve your complaint you have the right to seek mediation, arbitration through the courts, relevant Government commissions or the Ombudsman.</p>