



# ST FRANCIS DE SALES CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL OAK PARK



## GRIEVANCE POLICY (Parents/Caregivers)

### APPENDIX:

1. Complaint Process
2. Complaints in regards to Child Safety

#### **St Francis de Sales Catholic Primary School Commitment Statement to Child Safety**

*A safe and nurturing culture for all children and young people at our Catholic school*

'The intention for this statement is to provide a central focus for child safety<sup>1</sup> at our Catholic school, built around a common understanding of the moral imperative and overarching commitments that underpin our drive for improvement and cultural change....

...St Francis de Sales Primary School together with the CECV will stay abreast of current legislation and will meet legislative duties to protect the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in our care, including the Victorian Child Safe Standards (Victorian Government 2016), mandatory reporting, grooming, failure to disclose and failure to protect requirements<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>As defined by the Victorian Government Special Gazette No. 2 (2016), 'children and young people' in this document refers to those children and young people enrolled as students in Catholic schools in Victoria.

<sup>2</sup>St Francis de Sales Catholic Primary School Commitment Statement to Child Safety

#### **EVIDENCE OF THIS OCCURRING AT ST FRANCIS DE SALES**

St Francis de Sales Primary School, together with the guidance of the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV) holds the care, safety and wellbeing of children and young people as a central and fundamental responsibility of Catholic education. This commitment is drawn from and inherent to the teaching and mission of Jesus Christ, with love, justice and the sanctity of each human person at the heart of the Gospel.

Our utmost responsibility at St Francis de Sales is to create a child-safe school environment. It is a dynamic process that involves active participation and responsibility by the whole school community.

St Francis de Sales Primary School, in partnership with families, will ensure children and young people, are engaged and active participants in decision-making processes, particularly those that have an impact on their safety. This means that the views of staff, children, young people and families are taken seriously and their concerns are addressed in a just and timely manner.

#### **Rationale**

Positive, clear and effective processes for resolving grievances between the school and community members assists in the building of strong relationships, dispels anxiety and ultimately provides students with an enhanced learning environment.

#### **Goals**

To provide clear, positive and fair processes that allow grievances to be aired and resolved in a timely and effective manner.



# ST FRANCIS DE SALES CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL OAK PARK



## **Implementation**

St Francis de Sales prides itself on clear, consultative and open communication. While we accept our responsibility to consult and to communicate both clearly and effectively with the community, community members also have an obligation to read notices, information on our website, newsletters, to attend meetings and to seek clarification when required. There may, however, still be times when members of the community disagree or are confused about the actions we are taking.

All Catholic schools are required to have a proper complaints policy and processes. You are always entitled to seek information, advice and support to raise a concern or a complaint from an advocacy organisations. We recommend that you try to resolve the issue with the school first wherever possible. If this is unsuccessful, you have the right to take your complaint further.

## **How an advocate can help List of advocacy organisations**

The Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV) website suggests who you can complain to, what procedures should be followed, and how and where to appeal if you are unsatisfied with the outcome. Key aspects of this policy are summarised below, but you should always read and follow the school's policy prior to making a complaint. This makes it more likely that your complaint can be resolved quickly, and it also helps if you need to take your complaint further.

You can visit the CECV website: <http://www.cecv.catholic.edu.au/> – search under 'complaints'.

## **Resources:**

**Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV)**  
**Catholic Education Melbourne**  
**Ministerial Order 870**  
**Association for Children with a Disability (ACD)**

## **Evaluation**

As part of the School Improvement Plan

## **Staff Members Involved**

John Rudd (Principal)

## **Date of Ratification**

December 2017

## **Date for Review**

2018



# ST FRANCIS DE SALES CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL OAK PARK



## APPENDIX 1

### Complaint process

The following is based on the CECV template.

Schools generally require that parents or carers first try to resolve any complaint with the relevant teacher. You can also consider raising the issue with your child's Program Support Group, or with the school welfare coordinator, chaplain or integration coordinator. If this is unsuccessful, you can take your complaint to the principal, or other school personnel who are designated to assist.

The following personnel at St Francis de Sales School may be able to assist you:

- Mr John Rudd (School Principal)
- Mr Denis Johnstone (Deputy Principal)
- Mrs Stephanie Stedman (Student Well-being Leader)
- Ms Catherine Joyce (Learning Diversity Leader)
- Ms Kathleen Morrison (Religious Education Leader)
- Fr Thien Vo (Parish Priest)

If there is any reason why the designated personnel cannot investigate your complaint (for example if there is a conflict of interest or personal relationship between them and anyone involved), you should be referred to someone else who will investigate.

The principal or other designated personnel should conduct an impartial and confidential process to investigate the complaint, and make a written record of the complaint. The process might involve separate interviews with everyone involved, including any witnesses. The importance of confidentiality will be stressed to everyone involved.

The complaints officer will then report back to you on what was said, and what action will be taken to resolve the issue, if your complaint was substantiated. Examples of actions include: agreed actions if a similar issue arises again, an apology, a change of policy, a change of decision, disciplinary action (for a student or staff member) or counselling for the complainant.

### Possible outcomes of your concern or complaint

Be clear about what outcome you would like, before raising your concern or complaint. Clarify this in your own mind, and be clear about it in your communications with the school.

Your child has a right to the learning and supports they need at school. You also have the right to stand up for your child, to ask for what they need, and to get support to do so. You are more likely to succeed in resolving your concern if your desired outcome is based on a good understanding of:

- [your child's rights \(and your rights\) in the school system](#)
- [the support system students with disabilities](#), and
- [how education planning works](#) for students with disabilities, including how schools are required to consult with parents and carers to understand and address their child's disability and its impact on their educational needs.
- Read more about [how an advocate can help](#)
- [Contacts for advocacy organisations](#)
- Learn more about successful strategies for [raising a concern with the school](#).

### Possible outcome 1: your complaint is resolved

A complaint is resolved if you (and your child, where relevant) and the school and/or DET agree on a solution. Depending on your concern, a solution might comprise one or more of a range of actions. These might be undertaken by the school, by DET staff, by you or your child. Agreed actions should be undertaken as soon as possible.

Possible actions might include:

- The school explains what happened, and why it happened
- You and the school acknowledge each other's perspectives on something that happened, and agree on how similar issues will be handled in future
- Relevant professional development for staff in how to respond to complaints and/or to improve knowledge and skills in another relevant area



# ST FRANCIS DE SALES CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL OAK PARK



- The school expresses: regret for its actions, an apology for its actions, or an admission of fault for its actions
- The school changes a decision that it made
- The school changes a policy, procedure or practice
- Agreement on what constitutes acceptable behaviour by a student, staff member, parent or carer or other member of the school community
- An undertaking that unacceptable behaviour will change from a student, staff member, parent or carer or other member of the school community
- The school waives debts relating to school fees and payments and/or issues a refund for payments
- The school provides or funds counselling or other support for you and/or your child.

## **Possible outcome 2: your complaint is dismissed**

There are limited circumstances in which a complaint may be dismissed without being investigated. Such circumstances may arise where a complaint has already been investigated by the school or by DET, and there is no further information available to warrant re-investigation, notwithstanding that the parents or carers might be dissatisfied with the outcome. Otherwise, a complaint may be dismissed without investigation where the complaint is vexatious; that is, where preliminary enquiries indicate that there is no basis at all to the complaint, and that it was made for the purpose of causing embarrassment to someone, or to create conflict.

## **Possible outcome 3: your complaint is unresolved**

A complaint is unresolved if you and the school cannot agree on a solution, or if the agreed course of action cannot be implemented. If this happens, the school must seek support from the DET regional office – you also have the right to approach the DET regional office directly. If the regional office cannot successfully resolve your complaint, the school (or you) can refer the matter to DET central office. If your complaint is still unresolved after all of DET's procedures are exhausted, DET can refer you to an external complaints body such as the Victorian Ombudsman.

You can also take your complaint to an external complaints mechanism at any time.

You are also entitled to seek legal advice and representation. Bear in mind that if you do this in relation to a government school, your issue will be referred to DET's legal services department. At this point, the DET complaints policy no longer applies, and your complaint will be referred to lawyers representing DET.

- Find out more about [taking your complaint to the DET regional or central offices](#).
- Find out more about [external complaints mechanism, including the Ombudsman and human rights bodies](#).

## **Taking it further**

Complaints should always be resolved at the local level, if possible. If you are unhappy with the complaints officer's handling of your concern or complaint, you can ask for the decision to be reviewed by the principal (if the complaints officer is a staff member other than the principal). They will review how the complaint was handled, and if they believe that it was not handled appropriately, will organise for a different person to look at the complaint again.

If you are unhappy with the school's response to your complaint (or if complaining to the school directly is inappropriate, for example if it relates to the principal) then you can take your complaint to the next level – the diocese office – or you can use an external complaints mechanism.



## ST FRANCIS DE SALES CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL OAK PARK



### Contacts for Victorian Diocese Offices

The next avenue for appeal within the Catholic education system is to the Catholic Education Office in your local diocese. In the Melbourne Archdiocese, contact the Chair of the Pastoral Care Unit; in the regional dioceses, contact the Educational Consultant. You can also contact an external complaints body at any time.

#### ● CATHOLIC EDUCATION MELBOURNE

228 Victoria Parade,  
East Melbourne  
Victoria 3002  
Ph: (03) 9267 0228  
<http://www.cem.edu.au/>

#### ● CATHOLIC EDUCATION MELBOURNE

(Northern Region)  
CNR Rosslyn and Howard Street  
WEST MELBOURNE VIC 3003  
Ph: (03) 8387 3200  
Fax: (03) 9326 7443

[www.cem.edu.au/office-services/location-contacts/northern/](http://www.cem.edu.au/office-services/location-contacts/northern/)

If you are unhappy with the response of the diocese office, you can contact the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria, or make a complaint externally at any time. You are also entitled to seek legal advice and representation should you wish to do so.



# ST FRANCIS DE SALES CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL OAK PARK



## APPENDIX 2

### Complaints in regards to Child Safety

Whatever school your child is in, you have the right to raise a concern or make a complaint, and to get help to do so. All schools and education providers must comply with the Disability Standards for Education and all relevant laws, including equal opportunity laws. All schools are required to have a complaints handling policy.

If you are considering raising a concern or complaint about your child's school, it's a good idea to read St Francis de Sales School Policies first. Our school policies are accessible on our school website or can be obtained from the school office. If you follow the school's policy and procedures in raising a concern or complaint, this will increase your chance of success; it will also help if you need to take your complaint to the next level.

You always have the right to seek support to raise a concern with your child's school, for example from an advocacy organisation like Association for Children with a Disability (ACD).

A number of complaints mechanisms are available to students, parents and carers in Catholic and independent schools, within the Catholic and independent schools systems, and through external bodies.

### Minimum Child Safe Standards

The Victorian government has now introduced minimum child-safe standards into law to ensure organisations providing services for children and young people create child-safe environments.

In accordance with the recently released Ministerial Order No 870, all Victorian schools will be required to comply with these new standards from 1 August 2016 as part of their registration requirements. Schools will be expected to show that they have strategies, procedures, policies and systems in place that comply with the seven new standards and three principles that underpin the Ministerial Order.

Every child has the right to be safe at school. If you are ever concerned that your child is at risk of or is being subjected to any form of violence or abuse at school, this is a matter for the police, rather than the usual complaints processes.

You do not have to go to the school first, or inform them that you are contacting police. Schools have a special duty of care to their students. If you have any concerns about the safety of your child, or any child at school, please do not hesitate to contact the police. The same applies if you are concerned about any potential criminal matter at school.

In an emergency you should always telephone 000. Or you can contact your regional Victoria Police SOCA (Sexual Offences and Child Abuse) Unit. Find contacts at [police.vic.gov.au](http://police.vic.gov.au) – search under "SOCA unit".

St Francis de Sales School's 'Commitment Statement to Child Safety' and our policies on relating to Child Safety are accessible on our website and can be obtained at our school office.

### Minimum Standards and Complaints

All Victorian schools are accountable to government authorities. To operate, all Victorian schools must be registered with the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA), the peak statutory body responsible for accreditation, registration and certification in Victorian schools. The VRQA sets minimum standards that schools must meet, in order to operate. One of these requirements is that the school must have a proper policy and procedures for complaints handling.

The VRQA also acts as the 'review body' for complaints about independent schools, as outlined below. However, the VRQA has a formal agreement with DET and the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria



# ST FRANCIS DE SALES CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL OAK PARK



(CECV) that they will act as the 'review bodies' for complaints about government and Catholic schools respectively.