



Complaints Handling Policy

Our ability to identify, manage and promptly resolve complaints, received from parents, students, and other key stakeholders, is a key part of our Governance Program.

To manage complaints effectively, we have established a Complaints Handling framework in line with the Australian and International Standard for Complaints Handling (AS ISO 10002-2006).

Vision Statement

The purpose of Pacific Valley Christian School is to provide a Christian educational community as a centre of teaching and learning excellence, founded on Biblically-based beliefs, values and behaviour.

Rationale

The purpose of Pacific Valley Christian School Complaints Handling Policy is to provide a student or parent(s)/legal guardian with the opportunity to access procedures to facilitate the resolution of a dispute or complaint. These internal procedures are a conciliatory process.

Policy

Pacific Valley Christian School recognises that it is good and fitting that members of communities have opportunity to express disappointment or disapproval and seeks to engage with such situations with the intent of clearly reaching mutual understanding amongst the parties involved.

Definition of 'Complaint'

A complaint is:

"An expression of dissatisfaction made to an organisation, related to its products or services, or the complaints handling process itself, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected."

The term 'complaint' is used to refer collectively to any inquiry, comment, complaint or dispute raised by a person expressing dissatisfaction as to a particular circumstance, or situation, related to our services or operations.

A complaint can sometimes be difficult to distinguish from other communications such as critical feedback and queries. A complaint should be recorded and actioned where it relates to alleged failures in service delivery or operations, or inappropriate or unprofessional behaviour. Complainants may include both parents and students.

Complaints Management Principles

When managing a complaint or an appeal, the School will:

- Provide information to the school community about how and where to complain and to make the complaints management process as simple and accessible as possible.
- Ensure that complainants are informed as to the progress of their complaint and ensure that complaints are resolved as quickly as possible.
- Aim to understand the complaint from their point of view and ensure that complaints are thoroughly investigated and that the school understands the complaint from the complainants point of view.
- Make sure all complaints are addressed, on their merits, in an equitable, impartial, objective and unbiased manner.
- Keep complaints confidential and ensure that personal identifiable information about complainants and about any person that is the subject of the complaints is only available for the purpose of addressing the complaint. Staff members receiving complaints should not discuss these with other students or staff other than with the Complaints Officer.
- Keep records of complaints and the information collected in the complaints handling process.

How The School Handles Complaints

Verbal Complaints

Staff members receiving a verbal complaint should listen and acknowledge the complainants feelings, empathise without agreeing with the complainant and outline to the complainant the complaints handling process, record the information concerning the complaint.

Written Complaints

All written complaints should be acknowledged in writing and responded to as soon as possible. Where it is suitable to organise a face to face meeting to resolve the complaint, this should occur.

Process for making complaints

• Students

- a) Students should at the first instance approach the staff member and attempt to resolve the concern. Staff members should respond by the end of the next working day.
- b) If this is not resolved, students should approach the relevant staff supervisor. In the case of a Pastoral Care issue, students (Years 5-12) will complete an Incident Report form and the Year Advisor will initially deal with the complaint. This will be referred to the Head of School if a resolution is not reached. In the case of a curriculum issue students will be referred to the relevant Faculty Facilitator who will ask the student to put their concerns in writing. This matter will be referred on to the Head of School and the Dean of Curriculum. Students (Yrs. K-4) should approach their Year Advisor and may do so with parent support.
- c) If the matter cannot be resolved through mediation, the matter will be referred to the Assistant Principal.
- d) At this point, the student should notify the school in writing of the nature and details of the complaint.
- e) Each complainant has the opportunity to present his/her case to the Assistant Principal. Students may be accompanied by a support person. If this meeting is unable to reach a resolution, a formal complaints process would commence.
- f) The formal complaints process will commence within 10 working days of the lodgement of the complaint with the Principal.
- g) Once the Principal has come to a decision regarding the complaint, the student will be informed in writing of the outcome and the reasons for the outcome.
- h) If the complaints procedure finds in favour of the student, the School will immediately implement the decision and any corrective and preventative action required.
- i) If the complaints procedure does not find in favour of the student or the student is dissatisfied with the result of the complaints procedure, he/she will be informed of the external complaints and appeals process available to them at minimal or no cost.
- j) The School undertakes to finalise all complaints procedures within 20 working days.
- k) For the duration of the appeals process, the student is required to maintain enrolment and attendance at all classes as normal.

• Parent(s) / Legal Guardians

- a) In the case of an initial concern, the parent should contact the staff member concerned by phone or email. Staff should respond to this by the end of the next working day.
- b) If the issue is not resolved, parent(s)/legal guardians should contact the Year Advisor or the relevant Faculty Facilitator in the first instance to attempt mediation/informal resolution of the complaint. This will be referred onto the relevant Head of School. In the case of a curriculum issue the grievance will also be referred onto the Dean of Curriculum.
- c) If the matter cannot be resolved through mediation, it will be referred to the Assistant Principal.
- d) If the matter cannot be resolved, it will be referred to the Principal.
- e) At this point, parent(s)/legal guardians must notify the school in writing of the nature and details of the complaint.
- f) Each complainant has the opportunity to present their case to the Principal. Parent(s)/legal guardians may be accompanied by a support person.
- g) The School's formal complaints process will commence within 10 working days of the lodgement of the complaint with the Principal.
- h) Once the Principal has come to a decision regarding the complaint, the parent(s)/legal guardian will be informed in writing of the outcome and the reasons for the outcome.
- i) If the complaints procedure finds in favour of the parent(s)/legal guardian, the School will immediately implement the decision and any corrective and preventative action required.
- j) If the complaints procedure does not find in favour of the parent(s)/legal guardian or the parent(s)/legal guardian is dissatisfied with the result of the complaints procedure, the School will advise of the external complaints and appeals process available to them at minimal or no cost.

The School undertakes to finalise all complaints procedures within twenty (20) working days.

Complaints Handling Procedures for Misconduct or Reportable Conduct

When a student or parent/caregiver makes a formal complaint regarding misconduct or reportable conduct, the School will follow the procedures outlined in the **Child Protection - Reportable Conduct of Staff, Volunteers and Others Policy**, including:

- Provide information to the stakeholder to make a written notification to the Principal.
- This can be done using a School email account, posted letter, or hand delivered letter. Verbal accounts must be confirmed in writing.
- The School will provide in writing an acknowledgement of the received complaint and the process to be undertaken to investigate the complaint. This will include interviews with the stakeholder and their support person, interviews with any alleged witnesses, and interviews with the staff member about whom the complaint has been made (and their support person).
- The School will periodically update the complainant on the investigation process (as appropriate).
- Once the investigation has been finalised, the complainant parent/caregivers will receive formal written notification that the process has been finalised. There may be limitations under the Ombudsman's Act and privacy legislation regarding disclosure of information about an investigation and the outcome of an investigation.
- Due to the nature of certain allegations, there may be an external investigator handling the complaint. The School will work with this external investigator to ensure the correct procedure is undertaken. This may increase the length of the investigation.

Key Steps in the School Complaints Handling Process

Complaints must be addressed promptly in accordance with their nature and level of urgency. In all cases the school must aim to acknowledge receipt of a complaint, or dispute, immediately and seek to resolve all complaints internally

Dealing With Informal Complaints

There are likely to be many occasions where someone makes a statement, or sends an email, that is an expression of dissatisfaction as to some aspect of School's service or operations (and hence falls within the definition of a "complaint") where a resolution can be quickly and easily achieved, usually through verbal communications. Whilst an individual complaint may on the surface appear to be minor, if the School was to receive 10 such complaints from parents, it would indicate a systemic issue which would require formal rectification action.

Receiving And Logging Complaints

All complaints received (whether verbally or in writing), must be recorded.

In the event that a complaint, whether it be written or verbal, is received and is not an informal complaint that can be resolved immediately, the staff member to whom the complaint was addressed must send a written acknowledgement of the complaint to the complainant.

In less serious instances this acknowledgement may be a relatively informal email communication, phone call, or face to face discussion. As the seriousness of complaint increases the formality of the communication should also increase.

In all circumstances the acknowledgement should be provided as soon as possible.

Immediate Acknowledgement of Complaint

The School should immediately acknowledge the receipt of complaints and address them promptly in accordance with their degree of urgency.

Target Resolution Timeframe

The school aims to resolve all complaints within twenty (20) working days.