



Complaints and Dispute Resolution Policy

Policy Statement

Saint Stephen's College (the College) is committed to ensuring that complaints from members of the College community are dealt with in a responsive, efficient, effective and fair way. The College views complaints and disputes as part of an important feedback and accountability process.

Saint Stephen's College acknowledges the right of students, parents and members of the community to complain when dissatisfied with an action, inaction or decision of the College. Complaints will be acknowledged in a timely manner and the complainant will be kept informed throughout the process in a manner that does not distract staff from their responsibilities to the students of the College. Complaints will be dealt with in an equitable, objective and unbiased manner, respecting privacy and confidentiality obligations wherever possible.

The College recognises that time spent on handling disputes can be an investment in better service to students, parents and employees.

Types of Disputes that may be Resolved under this Policy

The College encourage students and parents to promptly lodge concerns regarding harassment, discrimination and privacy breaches, as well as more general complaints that include areas, such as:

- the College, its employees or students have done something wrong;
- the College, its employees or students have failed to do something that they should have done;
- the College, its employees or students have acted unfairly or impolitely;
- issues of student behaviour that are contrary to the code of conduct;
- learning programs, assessment and reporting of student learning;
- communication with students or parents;
- College fees and payments;
- general administrative issues.

Student complaints may be brought by students or by parents on behalf of their children, as appropriate in the circumstances.

Issues Outside of this Policy

The following matters are outside of the scope of this policy and should be managed as follows:

- Child protection concerns or risks of harm to children should be dealt with in accordance with the law and the College's Child Protection Policy, which can be found on the College website.
- Student bullying complaints should be dealt with under the Student Bullying Policy, located on the College website.
- Student or employee violence or criminal matters should be directed to the Principal who will involve the Police as appropriate, or the complainant may deal with the police directly.



Developing character, inspiring hope

Dispute Resolution Principles

Saint Stephen's College is committed to managing disputes according to the following principles:

- Disputes will be resolved with as little formality and disruption as possible
- Disputes will be taken seriously;
- Disputes will be dealt with fairly and objectively and in a timely manner;
- Mediation, negotiation and informal resolution are optional alternatives to investigation;
- Procedural fairness will be ensured wherever practicable;
- Natural justice principles will be observed wherever practicable;
- Confidentiality and privacy will be maintained as much as possible;
- All parties to the dispute will be appropriately supported;
- All parties are entitled to reasonable progress updates;
- Appropriate remedies will be offered and implemented;
- A review mechanism will be offered;
- Complainants, respondents and people associated with them will not be victimised as a result of lodging the dispute nor will they suffer any other reprisals;
- The College will keep confidential records of disputes;
- Anonymous complaints will not normally be dealt with.

Responsibilities

The College

The College has the following role and responsibilities:

- Develop, implement, promote and act in accordance with the policy and procedures;
- Appropriately communicate the College's Dispute Resolution Policy and procedures to students, parents and employees;
- Upon receipt of a dispute, manage the dispute in accordance with the dispute resolution model prescribed in the procedures;
- Ensure that appropriate support is provided to all parties to a dispute;
- Take appropriate action to prevent the victimisation or action in reprisal against the complainant, respondent or any person associated with them;
- Appropriately implement remedies;
- Appropriately train relevant employees;
- Keep appropriate records;
- Monitor and report on disputes.

All Parties to a Dispute

The complainant has the following role and responsibilities:

- Apply and comply with the College's dispute resolution policy and procedures;
- Lodge disputes promptly as soon as possible after the issue occurs or as otherwise appropriate;
- Expect that the dispute will be dealt with fairly and objectively; in a timely manner; with procedural fairness wherever practicable; that natural justice principles will be observed wherever practicable; that confidentiality and privacy will be maintained as much as possible;
- Provide complete and factual information in a timely manner;
- Not provide deliberately false or misleading information;
- Not make frivolous or vexatious complaints;
- Act in good faith, and in a calm and courteous manner;
- Show respect and understanding of each other's point of view and value difference, rather than judge and blame;
- Act in a non-threatening manner;
- To be appropriately supported;
- Acknowledge that a common goal is to achieve an outcome acceptable to all parties;
- Recognise that all parties have rights and responsibilities which must be balanced;
- Maintain and respect the privacy and confidentiality of all parties;
- Not victimise or act in reprisal against any party to the dispute or any person associated with them;

- Provide their name to the person receiving the complaint. The complainant may request that the College withholds their name as the matter progresses; however, the College may refuse to process the complaint if it considers it cannot act without revealing the name of the complainant.

Employees Receiving a Complaint

Employees receiving disputes have the following role and responsibilities:

- Act in accordance with the College's dispute resolution policy and procedures;
- Maintain confidentiality where practicable;
- Keep appropriate records;
- Forward complaints to more senior employees, as appropriate;
- To be appropriately supported;
- Not victimise or act in reprisal against the complainant, respondent or any person associated with them.

Immediate Supervisors of Employee First Receiving the Complaint (Head of Program, Head of Year, Head of Faculty)

- Inform the party lodging the dispute of how disputes can be lodged, when they should be lodged and what information is required;
- Provide the complainant with information about the College's dispute resolution policy and procedures
- Maintain confidentiality where practicable;
- Keep appropriate records;
- To be appropriately supported;
- Not victimise or act in reprisal against the complainant, respondent or any person associated with them;
- If necessary refer the matter to a member of the College Executive.

Implementation

Saint Stephen's College is committed to raising awareness of the process for resolving disputes at the College, including by the development and implementation of this policy and related procedures, and through the clear support and promotion of the policy and procedures.

The College is also committed to appropriately training relevant employees (especially senior staff) on how to resolve disputes in line with this policy and the related procedures.

The College will keep appropriate records of disputes, will monitor disputes and their resolution. The College will act to encourage students, parents and employees to contribute to a healthy College culture where disputes are resolved with as little formality and disruption as possible.

Complaint Management Procedure

All complaints will be handled seriously

It is the policy of the College that all complaints will be acknowledged as soon as practicable; or within five working days if the matter is complex. Communication will be maintained to inform stakeholders what is happening to their concern or complaint, in a manner that does not distract staff from their responsibilities to the students of the College. If a more detailed response is needed, staff will communicate by what date it will be provided.

Complaint Management Hierarchy

To provide timely and effective response to complaints, parents and students are expected to follow the College hierarchy for complaint resolution listed below. (see the attached flow chart)

- Step 1. In the first instance students and parents should raise their concerns with the classroom teacher or Tutor.**
- Step 2. Should a resolution not be achieved from informal or formal communication with the teacher or Tutor, the matter will be passed to the relevant academic or pastoral care member of the management team (such as a P-6 Head of Programme, Head of Year or Head of Faculty). At this stage the complaint will be added to the Formal Complaints Log.**
- Step 3. Should the matter remain unresolved after involvement of members of the management team, the matter will be referred to the relevant member of the College Executive.**
- Step 4. Should the matter remain unresolved, the matter will be referred to the Principal.**

Informal Resolution

Local, informal resolution is the preferred method of resolving complaints at Saint Stephen's College. Informal Resolution may be appropriate where the aggrieved party is able to approach the other party to discuss the issue. This process may be sufficient to resolve the problem, without the need for recourse to a third party.

Formal Resolution

Formal resolution is managed by the relevant member of staff who does not have a conflict of interest that would compromise the integrity of the process. For example, if the line manager was a party to the complaint it would be inappropriate that they manage the resolution of the dispute.

A formal complaint is in written form and includes dates, times, places and details of what took place, who was involved and any other relevant information. It is lodged with the staff member's line manager, or a more senior manager.

Recording

All formal complaints will be maintained in a confidential complaints register, managed by members of the College management team. The log should contain the following information:

- date when the issue was raised;
- name of parent;
- name of pupil;
- brief statement of issue;
- location of detailed file;
- member of staff handling the issue;
- brief statement of outcome.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is an important issue for students, parents and staff. It is essential that any complaint is treated in a confidential manner and with respect.

Members of staff should know about complaints that might be damaging to their reputation. Such complaints will be known only to themselves and to those who have to be consulted. The College will provide support for staff against whom a complaint is made, upon request; this will be provided a support colleague who is not otherwise involved.

If there is a situation involving the police, the Principal, will take responsibility for action in the College and the College Board Chairperson will be informed as soon as possible.

Complaint Resolution Flow Chart

A student, parent or member of the College community has a concern about:

- the College, its employees or students have done something wrong;
- the College, its employees or students have failed to do something that they should have done;
- the College, its employees or students have acted unfairly or impolitely;

Anonymous complaints will be investigated on evidence available. The Principal has discretion as to what action, if any, should be taken, depending on the nature of the complaint.

Communicate the concern with the relevant student's teacher or Tutor Group teacher.

All parties follow the Dispute Resolution Guidelines.

Staff Responsibilities:

- The staff member receiving the report will acknowledge the complaint as soon as practicable, or within five working days for complex issues.
- Maintain communication with stakeholders regarding the progress of the complaint in the dispute resolution framework.
- Arrange for informal discussions to resolve the issue.

Agreed resolution of issue

Matter unresolved

Matter transferred to relevant manager:

e.g. Pastoral care issues – Head of Consolidations Programme or 7-12 Head of Year
 Academic issues – P-6 Head of Program or 7-12 Head of Faculty
 Administrative issues – Office Manager
 Grounds and Safety – Property Manager

Informal or formal meetings are arranged to reach agreement in resolution of the matter.

Agreed resolution of issue

Matter unresolved

Matter transferred to relevant person of responsibility:

Pastoral Care: Dean of Junior College or Dean of Wellbeing
 Academic: Dean of Junior College or Dean of Teaching and Learning
 Administrative: Commercial Manager
 Grounds and Safety: Director of Operations

Meeting arranged to reach agreement in the resolution of the matter.

Outcome recorded in confidential complaints log.

Review effectiveness of agreed resolution.

Matter unresolved

Agreed resolution of issue

Matter transferred to the **Principal**.

Formal meeting arranged to reach agreement in the resolution of the matter.