

Communications Policy



1. INTRODUCTION

At St. Thomas the Apostle Primary School, we are committed to building a school culture that features positive and respectful relationships. As a Catholic school, these relationships are grounded in the values of the gospel, in particular the values of justice, compassion, reconciliation, truth and love. In keeping with Catholic social teaching, a respect for the innate dignity of each person shapes all our relationships.

In building and nurturing this culture, we acknowledge that students and parents can sometimes feel aggrieved about something that is happening at the school. Every member of our school community has a right to have their grievance or complaint addressed, and we will work positively and resolutely to achieve a satisfactory outcome for the people involved.

This policy outlines our principles and procedures for receiving and resolving complaints. It ought to be read in conjunction with related policies and core documents of the school, namely:

- Parent School Relationship Code of Conduct Policy

2. COMPLAINTS RESOLUTION: GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In receiving and responding to complaints, the following guiding principles will direct and shape the school's actions:

- We will work with the complainant with respect, courtesy and openness and with a genuine desire to achieve fair and reasonable decisions.
- The complaint will be resolved as quickly as possible.
- Confidentiality, impartiality and the principles of natural justice will form the basis of our complaints resolution process.
- The person(s) facing the complaint will be provided with detailed information about the substance of the complaint and will have the opportunity to respond.
- Personal information disclosed will be treated as confidential.
- Our resolution process will be grounded in sound and fair procedures for information sharing, conciliation, investigation and decision making.
- If a satisfactory outcome cannot be achieved, the school will provide the complainant with options for having the decision reviewed or mediated via an external authority.
- The communal needs of the school community will in most instances exceed the needs of any individual.

3. EXPECTATIONS OF PEOPLE MAKING A COMPLAINT

In making a complaint, the school requests and expects that the complainant will:

- raise the concern or complaint as soon as possible after the issue has arisen with the most appropriate member of staff
- communicate and respond in ways that are constructive, fair and respectful
- provide complete and factual information about the concern or complaint

- observe confidentiality and a respect for sensitive issues
- act in good faith to achieve an outcome acceptable to all parties
- have realistic and reasonable expectations about possible outcomes/remedies.

If as a complainant you are a parent, and your concern/complaint relates to your child's treatment by another student or students while at school, the school expects that you will refer your complaint directly to the school, via your child's class teacher or member of senior leadership.

Under no circumstances should a parent approach another student while in the care of the school to discuss the issue or chastise him or her. Direct contact with parents to resolve the matter is also discouraged if the complaint pertains to issues or incidents that have arisen at the school.

Complainants are expected to refrain from using electronic means such as email or social media to address matters of concern or that are of a confidential matter. Such matters are always best discussed in person or over the phone so that parent's and school perspectives can be better understood and addressed in an effective manner.

4. PROCEDURES

4.1 Key Referral People

Parents are encouraged to make contact with members of the school staff who are most closely connected with the query. For parents, this will be the child's class teacher. If there is any uncertainty about the most appropriate person to address a query, parents are encouraged to contact the school office. Reception staff will refer parents to the appropriate person.

4.2 Email Communications and Teaching Staff

Due to teachers' classroom and supervision duties, a parent's first contact is best made by email or telephone to the Office, with an appointment request for either a phone conference or face-to-face meeting. Parents are asked to outline their query, concern or issue (e.g. learning program, discipline, student/peer incidents) so that the staff member can prepare for the meeting/phone conference. Parents and staff are **strongly discouraged from sending or discussing confidential, contentious and/or emotional information via email.** These matters are best discussed face-to-face or over the phone.

4.3 Informal and Formal Resolution Processes

If initial communication between the parties does not resolve a complaint (an 'informal' resolution process), then the parent should:

- contact the principal or a senior member of staff to make an appointment for either a phone conference or a face-to-face meeting;
- outline the nature of the complaint, either verbally or in writing, and the steps taken to resolve it.

In moving to a more formal process, the principal or a senior member of staff will:

- organise a meeting/phone conference

- fully document the complaint, any actions taken to resolve it and outcomes of those actions
- further and fully investigate the matter
- ensure that no one is victimised as a result of a complaint being made
- if necessary, enable a complainant to be accompanied by another person of his/her choice as a support person
- enable the person against whom the complaint has been made to respond, and to be accompanied to any meeting by another person of his/her choice as a support person
- organise a process of mediation if a complaint cannot be satisfactorily resolved by the school.

4.4 Serious or Repeated Complaints, or Allegations of Misconduct

Where a complaint relates to an allegation of physical, emotional or sexual abuse, or when complaints are sufficiently serious or repeated, the principal will take action to report the matter to the appropriate authorities, ensure a comprehensive investigation, and work with all parties to facilitate a resolution.

4.5 Avenues of Appeal

If a complaint remains unresolved, or if the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcomes, the complainant has the right to seek other avenues of appeal through authorities such as the Catholic Education Office or Parish Priest.