

Complaints Management

Practical Guide for Schools

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Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd
James Gould House
228 Victoria Parade
East Melbourne VIC 3002

www.cecv.catholic.edu.au

Correspondence to:

The Company Secretary
Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd
PO Box 3
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 8002

Email: secretary@cecv.catholic.edu.au

ACN 119 459 853
ABN 92 119 459 853

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Foreword

Foundational to Catholic schools and our work with students, families and communities is the building of genuine, authentic relationships. Jesus modelled a transformation of the human spirit through collaboration, encouragement and building strong relationships. The development and promotion of meaningful relationships is a responsibility shared by all members of the school community, as they share a commitment to recognise and support the inherent dignity of each person.

At times, there may be misunderstandings and issues at a school which need to be resolved satisfactorily in partnership with members of the school community. This *Complaints Management: Practical Guide for Schools* has been designed to assist Victorian Catholic schools in achieving positive outcomes when dealing with grievances and complaints from parents, guardians, carers and students.

The Guide is in keeping with the promotion of fairness, integrity, respect, compassion and a belief in the dignity of each person. It outlines principles and practical steps involved in the stages of the complaint handling processes. Schools can use the advice in the Guide to develop and review their complaint handling policies and procedures as there are a number of common key features and requirements when dealing with complaints.

It is my hope that this Guide will be a useful resource for your school and support the ongoing work of creating positive and inclusive school communities.



Stephen Elder
Executive Director
Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd

Contents

Foreword	iii
Introduction	1
Rationale	1
Definition and scope	2
Child protection procedures.....	2
1. Guiding principles for the positive resolution of grievances or complaints	3
Creating an environment of openness and respect	3
Establishing a clear complaints policy and procedures.....	3
Communicating the complaints policy and procedures	3
Responding to complaints	4
Procedural fairness.....	4
Confidentiality	4
Anonymous complaints	5
Recording complaints.....	5
Dealing with difficult and unreasonable behaviour	6
Staff training	6
2. Procedures for managing complaints	7
Assessing and referring complaints.....	7
Options for resolving a complaint or grievance.....	9
Possible resolutions	10
Complaint escalation	10
3. Checklist for complaints policy and procedures in your school	11
Useful Resources	13
Appendices	
Appendix 1: Sample Acknowledgment Letter to Complainant.....	14
Appendix 2: Sample Complaint Form	15
Appendix 3: Sample Flow Chart of Procedures for Handling Complaints	16

Introduction

Catholic schools strive to be communities of faith, hope and love where communication takes place in an environment of transparency, respect, compassion, fairness, inclusion and a Christian concern for all.

Within the reality of the schooling experience, it is recognised that from time to time misunderstandings and issues will arise, and that these need to be resolved satisfactorily in partnership with members of the school community. These situations can be opportunities to model the love of Christ, and our response should be founded on a belief in the dignity of each person, on respect, compassion, integrity and truth.

The Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV) has developed this resource, *Complaints Management: Practical Guide for Schools* (Guide), to assist Victorian Catholic schools to develop and implement policy and procedures for managing disputes and handling grievances and complaints from parents, guardians, carers and students.

This Guide includes:

1. principles to encourage the positive resolution of grievances or complaints
2. procedures for managing complaints
3. a checklist for developing a complaints policy and procedures in your school.

Rationale

Governments and the community expect schools to have in place best-practice procedures to manage grievances and complaints. Schools are required to have complaints management policies and procedures in place with respect to the minimum standard of student welfare. The Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) [Guidelines to the minimum standards and other requirements for registration of schools](#) indicate that 'there must be evidence in the form of the school's policies and procedures with respect to managing complaints or grievances' (2016, p. 12). Schools also need to make their policy and procedures for the resolution of complaints publicly available to the school community (e.g. on their website, in their newsletter).

Having an effective complaints management process within a school:

- enhances staff relationships with parents, students and the broader school community
- encourages the resolution of concerns and disputes at the earliest possible stage
- creates expectations that the complaints management process will be respectful and courteous
- avoids escalation of vexatious or frivolous complaints
- empowers staff by giving them a clear path to resolve issues in a consistent, systematic and responsive way
- enables valuable feedback about where the school is not meeting parents' and students' needs
- ensures that a school complies with its legal obligations
- assists a school to continually improve its internal systems and controls
- protects and enhances a school's reputation.

Definition and scope

This Guide provides advice on how to respond to general complaints and grievances raised by parents, guardians, carers and students (complainants), so that all parties reach a positive resolution.

A grievance or complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived issue at a school where a response or resolution is expected.

The dissatisfaction will usually arise from a perception that the school has:

- done something wrong
- failed to do something it should have
- acted unfairly or inappropriately.

The complaint may be about an individual staff member, a student or a policy or procedure.

Examples may include issues related to:

- student discipline procedures
- learning and teaching
- students requiring educational adjustment
- damage/loss of personal property
- bullying and harassment by students against other students.

This Guide **does not** cover complaints:

- that are of a child protection nature. These must be addressed in accordance with child protection laws and reporting obligations (see [PROTECT: Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools](#))
- from staff about aspects of their work or employment conditions. It is appropriate that schools handle these matters in accordance with relevant internal policies and processes regarding these matters, and consider as appropriate the [Victorian Catholic Education Multi Enterprise Agreement 2013](#) (VCEMEA).

Child protection procedures

Nothing in this Guide replaces a school's obligations to comply with the legal requirements and procedures that relate to mandatory reporting and managing the risk of child abuse under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (Vic.), the *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic.), the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (Vic.), *Children Legislation Amendment (Reportable Conduct) Act 2017* (Vic.) and Ministerial Order No. 870 – *Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools* made under the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (Vic.). Schools must abide by the professional, moral and legal obligations to implement child protection and child safety policies, protocols and practices within their school.

If, in the course of carrying out their duties, a mandatory reporter forms a reasonable belief that a child is in need of protection from physical harm or sexual abuse, and that the **child's parents are unwilling or unable to protect the child**, they must report that belief to the Department of Health and Human Services/Child Protection and/or Victoria Police as described in the joint Protocol: [PROTECT: Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools](#).

Staff must use the [Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse](#) if they form a suspicion or reasonable belief that child abuse has occurred, or that a child is at risk of suffering abuse. Staff members are to keep clear and comprehensive notes relating to incidents, disclosures and allegations of child abuse using the [Responding to Suspected Child Abuse: A Template for all Victorian Schools](#).

1. Guiding principles for the positive resolution of grievances or complaints

Creating an environment of openness and respect

Positive resolution of grievances or complaints is more likely when:

- the school creates an expectation that everyone will be treated with respect
- the school encourages an openness to listening to the concerns of parents and students
- members of the school community can expect that their concerns will be taken seriously.

Establishing a clear complaints policy and procedures

Positive resolution of grievances or complaints is more likely when:

- the school has established a policy and procedures for handling complaints
- the school has consulted with staff, the parish and/or school board and other members of the school community in planning and developing the complaints policy and procedures
- the policy and procedures are clear and easy to understand.

A school's complaints policy and procedures should:

- define the nature and scope of what constitutes a complaint in the school.
- indicate that all complaints will be treated seriously, addressed professionally, competently and in a timely manner, and apply principles of procedural fairness and confidentiality
- specify who complainants should contact in the first instance when they have a concern and the method of contact they should use – this may vary with the nature of the issue
- provide flexibility in how to make a complaint, such as provision for verbal and written complaints, e.g. a dedicated email address, a phone number, or a form on the school's website (see [Appendix 2: Sample Complaint Form](#), on page 15)
- outline both an informal process and a formal process for resolving complaints, encouraging complainants to resolve their grievances initially in an informal manner so that complaints are resolved closest to the source of the issue
- set timelines for complaint management
- set out the expectation that all parties will conduct themselves in a respectful and courteous manner
- describe the possible resolution of the process, including what to do if the matter is not initially settled to the satisfaction of all parties.

Communicating the complaints policy and procedures

Positive resolution of grievances or complaints is more likely when:

- the school makes its policy and procedures for handling complaints easily available to members of the school community through a range of communications, such as the school website and newsletters, in enrolment procedures and by request
- the school provides translations into languages other than English, where appropriate
- the school ensures that all staff know and understand the school's policy and procedures.

Responding to complaints

Responsiveness is a key principle of a complaints management process. Positive resolution of grievances or complaints is more likely when the school:

- acknowledges the complaint promptly, whether formally or informally
- establishes a clear timeline for investigating and responding to the complaint, where required, and adheres to the timeline
- provides the complainant with the policy and procedures in order to clearly establish expectations at an early stage of the complaints handling process.

Not every issue requires a formal written acknowledgment. Complaints of a less serious nature (which is most complaints) can be acknowledged verbally and resolved without the need for a formal investigation or a written response. Where written acknowledgment is preferred, a sample acknowledgment letter is provided in [Appendix 2](#) on page 15.

Procedural fairness

The **principles of procedural fairness** apply to the handling of complaints and require the school to:

- respect the right of all parties to be heard and treated fairly
- respond to complaints promptly and thoroughly
- make sure all parties understand the complaints policy and the process
- if the complaint is about a person, give that person the opportunity to respond to any allegations
- conduct investigations impartially, substantiate the facts of the matter and maintain appropriate records
- appropriately communicate the reason for any decision and any action it intends to take
- meet privacy and other legal obligations
- record complaints on a secure database with relevant levels of authorised access.

Confidentiality

It is important that schools be as clear as possible about what information will and will not be treated in confidence. To maintain confidentiality in so far as that is reasonable, all participants in the process should only share information about the complaint to those who need to know in order to:

- refer the complaint (if appropriate, to a principal, deputy principal or school leader)
- manage the complaint
- provide advice and support in the process
- review and/or decide on actions and outcomes as appropriate.

Staff members involved in an investigation of a complaint should not discuss the matter with any other people not relevant to the matter.

Although a complainant may seek an assurance of confidentiality before expressing their issues, it may not always be possible for schools to provide such assurances. For example, if a complaint is about a staff member and the complainant does not want their name to be disclosed, the school may not be able to deal with the complaint on that basis as it may result in unfairness to the staff member. Therefore, schools may wish to insert a statement on this issue into their complaints policy such as:

We will treat your complaint with respect and sensitivity. However, it may not be possible that all communications with us, or any documents you may supply to us, will necessarily be kept confidential. Although we endeavour to deal with complaints with appropriate discretion, we reserve our right to disclose details of the matter to other persons who in our opinion need to know them, in order to facilitate the resolution of the complaint.

In any case where legal proceedings could eventuate, schools could consider obtaining legal advice before any major steps are taken in the investigation of the complaint, and before any documents such as witness statements or investigation reports are created. This is particularly important where the school would not want these documents to be made available to other parties. Communications between a lawyer and their client are considered as 'privileged', meaning that they do not have to be produced in legal proceedings.

Anonymous complaints

Schools may be unable to deal with complaints that are made anonymously if there is insufficient detail for investigation or resolution of the matter. However, there may be situations where it is possible to investigate an anonymous complaint, depending on the nature of the complaint and the circumstances.

Where possible, the school should encourage complainants to give their names and reassure them that complaints will be addressed professionally, competently and in accordance with the principles of procedural fairness and confidentiality. If the complainant persists in wishing to remain anonymous, it is at the principal's discretion what action, if any, will be taken.

Complaints from the public about the behaviour of a group of students can be dealt with on a general basis, with reminders to all students about the school's expectations.

The school should record anonymous complaints in the same way it records all other complaints.

NB Anonymous complaints of a child protection nature must be addressed in accordance with child protection laws and reporting obligations (see [PROTECT: Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools](#)).

Recording complaints

All complaints should be recorded, even those which are about issues perceived as trivial or minor. This helps to identify key risk areas and any whole-school issues which, if not resolved, could lead to an escalated or more serious grievance or complaint. Records are useful, too, if further disputation occurs or in the case of future legal action.

Schools should establish an appropriate records management system which protects the privacy of the individual(s) concerned and which contains full details of the complaint and actions taken to resolve the matter.

A record could contain the following information:

- the contact details of the complainant (i.e. parent/guardian)
- the date of the complaint and the method of communicating it to the school (e.g. in person, phone call, email, letter etc.)
- the nature of the complaint and the requested resolution
- the member of staff handling the issue
- any actions and time taken, minutes of meetings, and communications
- a statement of the outcome, including the closure date and the date of advising the complainant of the outcome.

It should be noted that documents that may be created during the course of investigating and handling a complaint might have to be produced in legal proceedings unless the complaint is subject to 'privilege', as mentioned above under 'Confidentiality'.

Dealing with difficult and unreasonable behaviour

A complainant may feel very strongly about a person or issue that is a real or perceived cause of their grievance. Some complainants, for a variety of reasons, have ongoing issues with their child's school, perhaps with a teacher or with a policy or procedures. In other instances, complainants do not wish to abide by the outcomes of the grievance process. These situations can sometimes result in emotional, difficult or unreasonable behaviour.

Such behaviour can arise because the school's complaints processes are not well known, not easily accessible or considered to be too difficult to follow, or because the complainants believe that they will not be given a fair hearing.

Following the guiding principles outlined in this section will assist all parties to approach the complaints handling process positively and reach an acceptable resolution. In particular, schools are advised to set behavioural expectations for all parties in their complaints management policies and make the policy and procedures available to the school community through a range of communications such as their website and newsletters, and through enrolment procedures.

A number of strategies may assist when meeting with the complainant. The staff member handling the complaint should:

- treat the complaint seriously and focus on the issue at hand, rather than the complainant's emotions or behaviour
- listen attentively, and take notes without defensive comment, repeating them to the complainant and asking whether they represent an accurate record of the issues
- communicate clearly and ask the complainant if they understand what you are talking about
- avoid becoming defensive or angry in response.

If the complainant's difficult or unreasonable behaviour escalates:

- ensure the safety and wellbeing of staff and students
- ask the complainant to be civil and warn them that any further repetition of unwarranted behaviour will lead to the termination of the conversation
- terminate the conversation or interview if the behaviour continues
- consult the principal or a delegated staff member to determine the next steps.

Staff training

Complaints can be handled by various staff members within a school. It is therefore important that staff receive professional learning, not only to ensure their knowledge and understanding of the school's policy and procedures, but also to develop skills in handling complaints.

Training in handling complaints could include the following topics:

- complaints procedures
- active listening
- observation, recording and reporting skills
- interviewing and negotiation skills
- mediation
- conflict resolution – dealing with abusive, aggressive or threatening behaviour
- privacy legislation.

2. Procedures for managing complaints

Assessing and referring complaints

When a staff member receives a complaint, the complaint should be **acknowledged** and the complainant provided with a copy of the **school's complaints handling policy and procedures** in order to clearly establish expectations at an early stage of the process.

The following steps can be followed when deciding on the appropriate option for resolution.

Note: This process is not applicable in a complaint of a child protection nature, which must be addressed in accordance with child protection laws and reporting obligations. (See [PROTECT: Identifying and Reporting to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools](#).)

STEPS	CONSIDERATIONS	ACTIONS
<p>1. Determine the seriousness of the complaint.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Is there a need for urgent action, especially if there are health or safety concerns for any persons? <input type="checkbox"/> Could the complaint have serious consequences for the parties concerned or others, resulting from a serious breach of legislation, school policy or procedure relating to issues which include but are not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – student discipline – bullying and harassment by students against other students – student drug and alcohol issues – damage/loss of personal property – students requiring educational adjustment – student wellbeing? <input type="checkbox"/> Is the issue complex and/or does it raise whole-school issues? <input type="checkbox"/> Are the parties unlikely to agree to informal resolution? <input type="checkbox"/> Is the complaint vexatious? <input type="checkbox"/> Is there potential for the complaint to escalate? <p>If the answer to any of these questions is YES, the matter can be considered as serious.</p> <p>If the answer to these questions is NO, the matter can be considered as less serious.</p>	<p>If the answer to any of these questions is YES, consult the principal, the deputy principal or a school leader as needed. An investigation may be required.</p> <p>If the answer to these questions is NO, deal with the issue in the ordinary course of your role, using informal options for resolution, or refer the complaint to the principal, the deputy principal or a school leader if you are unsure.</p> <p>Refer to steps 2 and 3.</p>

STEPS	CONSIDERATIONS	ACTIONS
<p>2. Record the complaint.</p>	<p>All complaints should be recorded, even those which are perceived as trivial or minor issues.</p> <p>This helps to identify key risk areas and any whole-school issues which, if not resolved, could lead to an escalated or more serious grievance or complaint.</p> <p>All communications, actions, notes from meetings, and developments should be recorded, including the resolution and the closure date.</p> <p>Records must be securely and confidentially stored in accordance with the school's privacy policy.</p>	<p>Record the complaint in the secure complaints management system or register, including the following information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contact details of the complainant (i.e. parent/guardian) • date and method the complaint was communicated to the school (e.g. in person, phone call, email, letter etc.) • nature of the complaint and requested resolution • staff member handling the issue • details of actions, communications and notes from meetings • statement of the outcome, including the closure date and the last correspondence.
<p>3. Choose an option for the resolution of the complaint.</p>	<p>Less serious complaints</p> <p>Minor grievances and complaints should be resolved promptly using informal options, so that complaints are resolved closest to the source of the issue.</p> <p>Determine the most appropriate informal option for resolution:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • self-resolution • supported self-resolution • facilitated mediation. <p>Serious complaints</p> <p>Grievances and complaints deemed to be serious should be resolved as soon as possible using formal options. These may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • intervention • investigation. <p>The appropriate process will be initiated by the principal, the deputy principal or a school leader.</p> <p>At times informal options, such as facilitated mediation, may be combined with formal options.</p>	<p>Select the appropriate option for resolving the complaint.</p> <p>Where appropriate inform the principal, the deputy principal or a school leader.</p> <p>Clarify with all parties involved which approach will be used and ensure the appropriate processes are in place.</p>
<p>4. Move to formal options when an informal option has not led to resolution of a less serious complaint.</p>	<p>For any matter which cannot be resolved by informal resolution, formal options will apply. They can be initiated by the principal, the deputy principal or a school leader or another designated staff member.</p>	<p>Refer the complaint to the principal, the deputy principal or a school leader for the next steps.</p>

STEPS	CONSIDERATIONS	ACTIONS
5. When formal options have not led to a resolution, refer the complaint further.	If a matter cannot be resolved at the school level through formal or informal options, or if the complaint is about the principal of the school, the complainant may be referred to the relevant Catholic Education Office or Regional Office or the relevant governing authority for the complaint to be dealt with in accordance with their complaints policy.	Refer the complainant to the Catholic Education Office or Regional Office or the relevant governing authority.

Options for resolving a complaint or grievance

There are both formal and informal options for the resolution of a grievance or complaint. Use of informal options is recommended in the first instance as it may prevent the escalation of a minor dispute to a more serious complaint.

Informal options

The following informal options could be considered:

Self-resolution – The parties themselves may resolve concerns in open discussion with the provision of relevant information or the clarification of issues. This option involves reflection and conversations respectful of each person’s needs in the school.

Supported self-resolution – The parties may be assisted to resolve a possible misunderstanding, miscommunication or lack of clarity about the issue in question by a support person such as a colleague, supervisor, principal, leader or counsellor providing professional advice or support.

Facilitated mediation – The parties may be assisted by a facilitator who is trained in mediation to identify issues, explore options and consider alternatives to find a resolution. The facilitator may be an external mediator, a senior colleague, a principal, a school leader or a counsellor.

Formal options

In circumstances where no mutually acceptable resolution to the matter is reached through informal resolution, or in cases where the matter is considered to be serious, formal procedures can include:

Intervention – The principal may meet with the party, or parties separately or jointly. If this does not resolve the issue then the principal makes a decision and notifies the parties of that decision.

Investigation – A complaint about a person concerning an alleged serious breach of legislation, school policy or procedure (e.g. student bullying, student drug and alcohol issues) may require an investigation.

Note: This process is not applicable in a complaint of a child protection nature, which must be addressed in accordance with child protection laws and reporting obligations. (See [PROTECT: Identifying and Reporting to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools](#).)

For a staff member, an investigation may be appropriate in those matters involving allegations of potential misconduct or misbehaviour, which may result in disciplinary action. An investigation into these types of allegations must be conducted in accordance with Clause 13 of the [VCEMEA](#).

The nature and scope of an investigation will depend on the circumstances of each matter and any relevant issues which need to be taken into account, such as whether the school had followed the relevant policies and procedures.

The purpose of an investigation is to establish and document relevant facts, reach appropriate conclusions based on the available evidence, and determine a suitable response.

Possible resolutions

Resolution for a complainant may include:

- feeling that their concern has been considered seriously
- knowing that the school is now alerted to a possible problem
- achieving an outcome which may be different from the one they sought, but which they perceive to be well considered
- receiving a verbal or written apology
- achieving a change to a policy, procedure or practice that would prevent a recurrence of similar complaints.

Resolution for the school may involve:

- reaching a compromise solution
- dismissing the complaint, e.g. if this decision accords with legislation or government policy or related workplace policy or procedures
- upholding the complaint and implementing a specific action, such as overturning a decision, giving an apology
- improving processes (i.e. changing procedures and workplace practices)
- increasing staff development, training or performance improvement
- improving implementation of school policies and procedures (e.g. issuing updated documentation or reminders)
- taking other actions to ensure that the matter is handled appropriately in future.

Potential improvements that could be made to school policy, procedures or practices that would resolve the complaint and prevent a recurrence of similar complaints can be assessed and initiated by the principal, the deputy principal, or a school leader.

Complaint escalation

Catholic schools in Victoria operate under a highly devolved model of governance where the parish priest or other relevant church authority is the legal employer and will have the ultimate decision-making authority over a complaint.

However, in each diocese, if a matter cannot be resolved at the school level, or if the complaint is about the principal of the school, complainants may contact the relevant Catholic Education Office or Regional Office for support and advice, and the complaint will be handled in accordance with the respective Catholic Education Office complaints policy:

- Catholic Education Melbourne: [2.20 Complaints Policy](#)
- Catholic Education Office Ballarat: [Complaints Policy](#)
- Catholic Education Office Sale: [Resolving Parent/Guardian Issues and Concerns](#)
- Catholic Education Office Sandhurst: [Complaints Policy](#).

In the case of a Catholic school governed by a Religious Institute or a Ministerial Public Juridic Person (MPJP), complainants can be referred to the appropriate governing authority. The online [Directory for Catholic Education Victoria](#) will provide the contact details of the appropriate person.

Refer to [Appendix 3: Sample Flow Chart of Procedures for Handling Complaints](#), page 16.

3. Checklist for complaints policy and procedures in your school

ELEMENTS	CHECKLIST FOR DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING A COMPLAINTS HANDLING POLICY AND PROCEDURES
Planning for complaints management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The school has consulted with staff, the parish and/or school board and other members of the school community for input and support in planning and developing the school’s complaints management policy and process.
Developing a complaints policy	<p>The school’s complaints policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> defines the nature and scope of what constitutes a complaint in the school. <input type="checkbox"/> indicates that all complaints will be treated seriously, addressed professionally, competently and in a timely manner, and apply principles of procedural fairness and confidentiality <input type="checkbox"/> sets out the expectations of how all parties will conduct themselves, such as in a respectful and courteous manner <input type="checkbox"/> outlines an informal process and a formal process for resolving complaints, encouraging complainants to resolve their grievances initially in an informal manner <input type="checkbox"/> sets timelines for complaint management <input type="checkbox"/> describes the process for making a complaint and specifies who complainants should contact in the first instance when they have an issue <input type="checkbox"/> provides flexibility in methods of making a complaint, such as provision for verbal and written complaints, e.g. a dedicated email address, a phone number, or a form on the website (see Appendix 2: Sample Complaint Form, page 15) <input type="checkbox"/> describes the possible outcomes of the process, including what to do if the matter is not initially settled to the complainant’s satisfaction.
Ensuring accessibility/visibility	<p>The school’s complaints policy and procedures are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> effectively communicated through a range of means such as newsletters, the school website and through enrolment procedures <input type="checkbox"/> readily accessible and clearly positioned on a school’s public website <input type="checkbox"/> available in different languages and formats where relevant.
Acknowledging complaints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The school’s policy and procedures include a process for acknowledging the complaint either verbally or in writing (see Appendix 1: Sample Complaint Acknowledgment Form). <input type="checkbox"/> The school provides the complainant with the school’s policy and procedures for managing complaints when a grievance or complaint is made.

ELEMENTS	CHECKLIST FOR DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING A COMPLAINTS HANDLING POLICY AND PROCEDURES
Recording complaints	<p>The school has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> established a process for recording and tracking complaints and outcomes, such as a software program or complaints register (see Appendix 2: Sample Complaint Form) – this enhances a school’s ability to analyse ongoing issues and trends for school improvement and aids the decision-making processes <input type="checkbox"/> ensured that grievances or complaints are recorded in the agreed system or register and contain the following information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the contact details of the parent/guardian/carer – the date of the complaint and the way it was communicated to the school (e.g. in person, phone call, email, letter etc.) – the nature of the complaint and the requested resolution – the member of staff handling the issue – the actions and time taken, minutes of meetings, and communications – a statement of the outcome, including a closure date and the date of advising the complainant of the outcome. <input type="checkbox"/> securely and confidentially stored all information in accordance with the school’s privacy policy.
Training Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Staff have received appropriate and adequate training on how to identify a complaint, when a complaint can be managed informally and when it should be referred. <input type="checkbox"/> The school leaders responsible for managing, investigating and dealing with escalated and or serious complaints that may be of a complex and difficult nature have received training in handling complaints.
Continuous improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The school regularly reviews its complaints-handling process to ensure continual improvement of school policy and procedures for effective complaints handling.

Useful Resources

- Field, James 2014, [*Complaints Handling in Australian Schools – Walking the tightrope between ignorance and knowledge*](#), Complispace, Sydney.
- Gruber, B & Gruber, S 2008, '[10 Tips to Deal with Difficult Parents Effectively](#)', *Teachers.Net Gazette*, 5 (3), March.
- New South Wales Ombudsman 2013, [*Managing Unreasonable Complainant Conduct – A model policy and procedure*](#).
- Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET) 2017, [*Parent Complaints*](#), revised.
- Victorian Ombudsman 2016, [*Complaints: Good practice guide for public sector agencies*](#).
- Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) 2016, [*Guidelines to the minimum standards and other requirements for registration of schools including those offering senior secondary courses*](#).

PROTECT – Child protection reporting obligations

- [*Identifying and responding to all forms of abuse in Victorian schools*](#)
- [*Four critical actions for schools: Responding to incidents, disclosures and suspicions of child abuse*](#)
- [*Responding to suspected child abuse: A template for all Victorian schools*](#).

PROTECT – Student Sexual Offending

- [*Guide to Identifying and Responding to Student Sexual Offending*](#)
- [*Four critical actions for schools: Responding to Student Sexual Offending*](#)
- [*Responding to suspected Student Sexual Offending: A template for all Victorian schools*](#).

Related Legislation

- *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic.)
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth)
- *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (Cth)
- *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (Vic.)
- *Education and Training Reform Regulations 2007* (Vic.)
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Vic.)
- *Health Complaints Act 2016* (Vic.)
- *Health Records Act 2001* (Vic.)
- *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* (Vic.)
- *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth).

Appendices

Appendix 1: Sample Acknowledgment Letter to Complainant

Dear [NAME]

I refer to information provided by you/your son/your daughter, [child's name], to [name], [position], regarding the attached complaint.

The matter has been referred to me and I propose dealing with it by (state the process). Please let me know if you have any comments or requests about the process of resolving the complaint.

You will be contacted at various stages of the process regarding progress of the complaint. If you require any information, please contact me on (telephone number).

Yours sincerely

Name

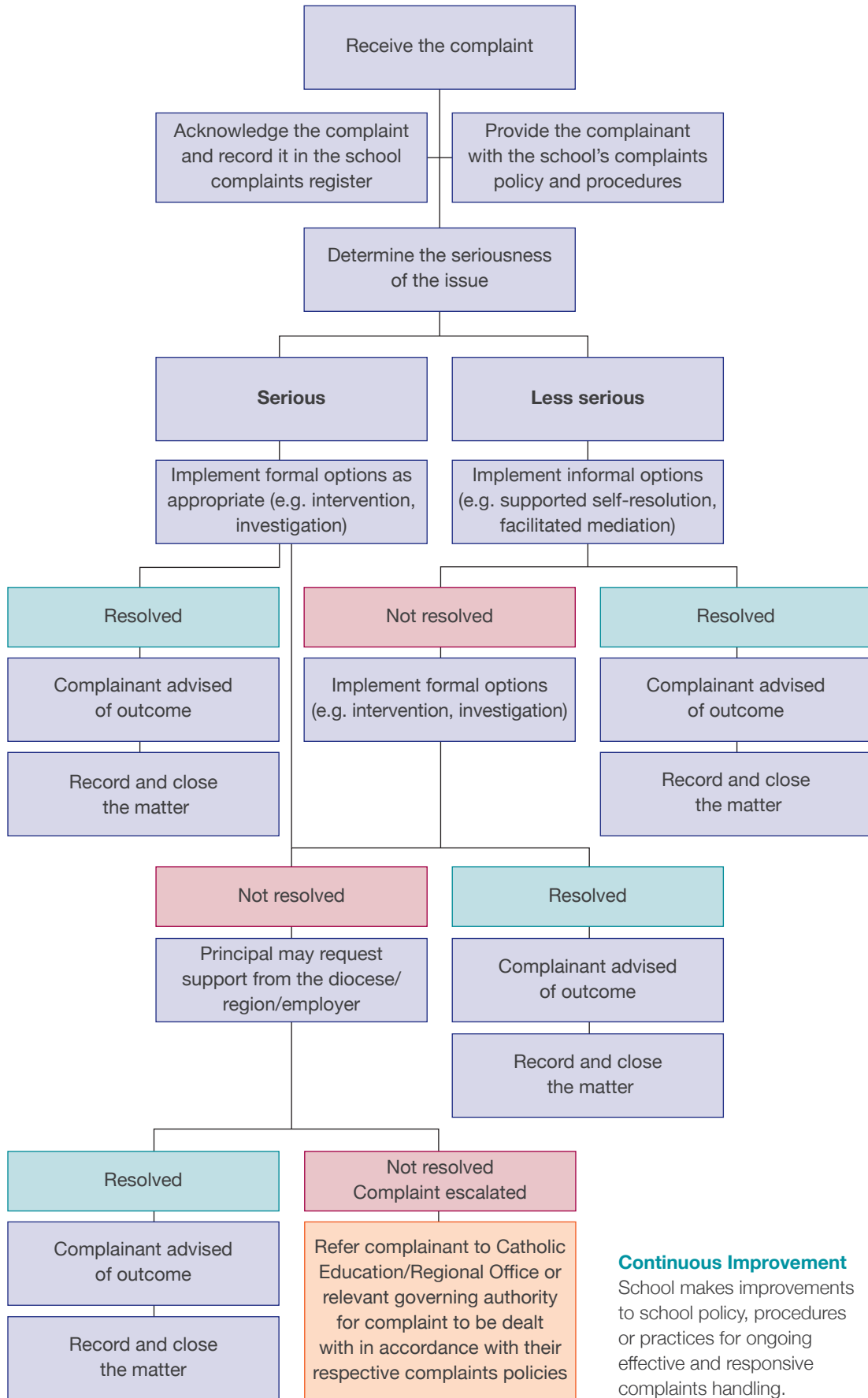
Date

Appendix 2: Sample Complaint Form

1. YOUR DETAILS	
Family name:	Given name(s):
Address:	
Contact number:	Email:
2. YOU ARE: (PLEASE TICK ONE)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Student	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent/caregiver <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)
3. SUBJECT OF THE COMPLAINT (PLEASE TICK ALL RELEVANT BOXES)	
<input type="checkbox"/> School	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff member <input type="checkbox"/> Student <input type="checkbox"/> Policy/Procedure
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)	
4. DETAILS OF THE COMPLAINT	
(Please attach additional page(s) if space is insufficient. You may also attach further documentation if you wish.)	
5. DETAILS OF THE OUTCOME YOU ARE SEEKING	
(Please attach additional page(s) if space is insufficient.)	
6. HAVE YOU PREVIOUSLY RAISED THIS CONCERN WITH A STAFF MEMBER? (PLEASE TICK)	
<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	If yes, when?
Who dealt with the matter?	
What was the result?	
Signature:	Date:

School Office use: RECORDING OF OUTCOMES	
<i>For matters which have been resolved:</i>	
Resolution options	
<input type="checkbox"/> Self-resolution <input type="checkbox"/> Supported self-resolution <input type="checkbox"/> Facilitated mediation <input type="checkbox"/> Intervention <input type="checkbox"/> Investigation	
Actions undertaken:	
Outcome:	
Date matter is finalised:	
Name of staff member:	Signature:
<i>For matters which need further action:</i>	
Referred to: Name:	Date:
Referred by: Name:	Signature:
Outcome:	
Name of staff member:	Signature:

Appendix 3: Sample Flow Chart of Procedures for Handling Complaints



Continuous Improvement
 School makes improvements to school policy, procedures or practices for ongoing effective and responsive complaints handling.