Complaints and Resolution Procedure

Reviewed: 2024, May 2025

The aim of the Disputes and Complaints Resolution Procedure is to outline the process followed by Mel Maria Catholic Primary School when dealing with disputes or complaints brought forward by members of the school community.

Sources of Authority: CEWA Community Policy

Executive Directive – Disputes and Complaints Resolution

Scope

- These procedures apply to all members of our school community and all members of the public involved in interactions with the school.

Principles

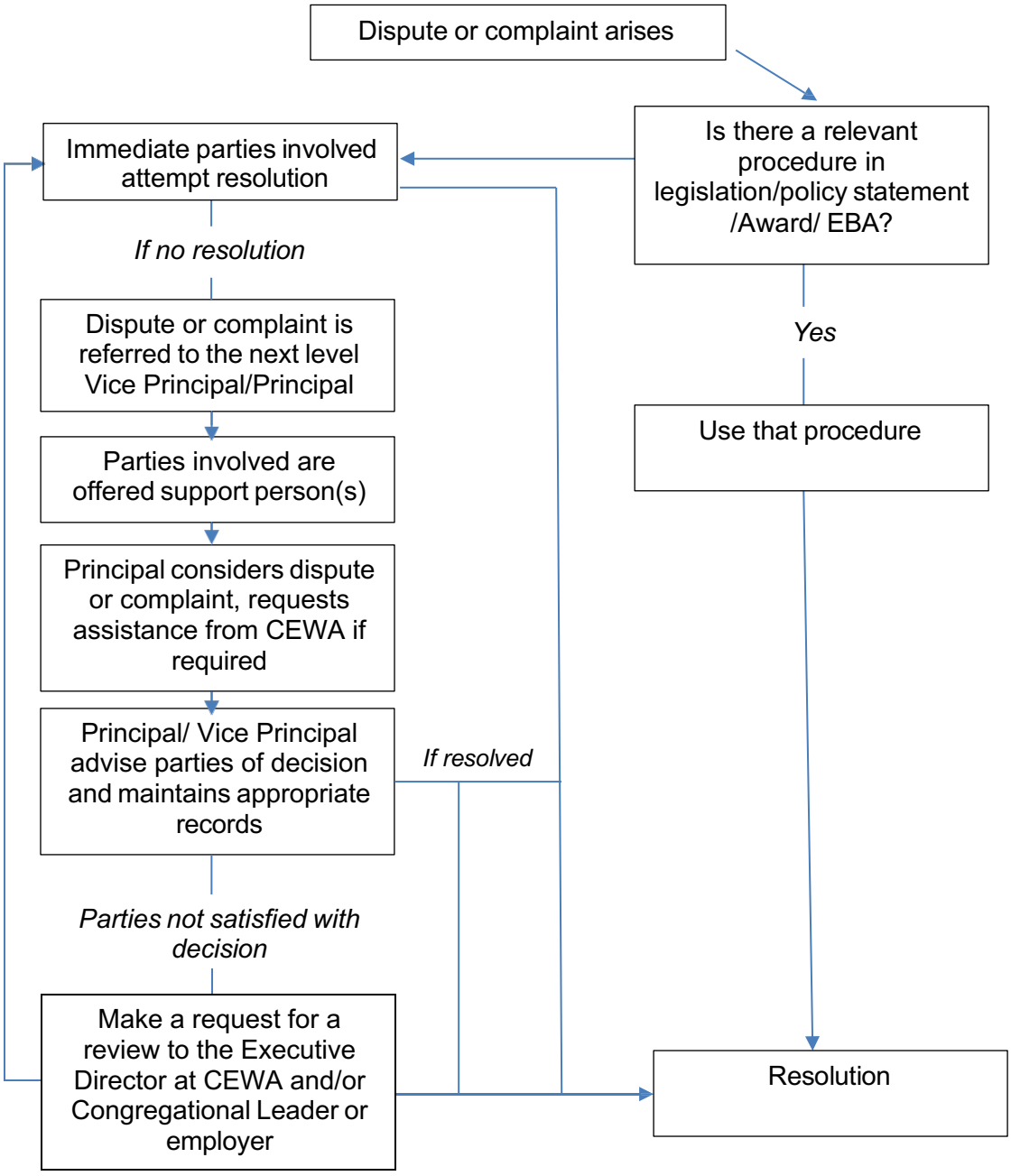
1. Complaint means an expression of dissatisfaction with Catholic Education policies, procedures, decisions, omissions, quality of service, staff or student behaviour.
2. Dispute means a conflict regarding a right, claim, or demand on one side, met by contrary claims or allegations on the other.
3. Procedural fairness refers to the procedures used by a decision-maker, rather than the actual outcome reached. It requires a fair and proper procedure be used when making a decision.
4. Resolution means that a matter has been resolved to the satisfaction of Catholic Education in Western Australia with respect to the paramount importance of the student(s).
5. Students are defined as children and young people enrolled at Mel Maria Catholic Primary School.
6. The school implemented procedures state a commitment to procedural fairness and cultural safety in the reporting and review of complaints, including:
    - a hearing appropriate to the circumstances;
    - lack of bias;
    - evidence to support a decision; and
    - inquiry into matters in dispute.

Procedures

a. The Principal must comply with the Privacy Executive Directive and Privacy Act 1988 in their collection, storage, use, disclosure and access to personal information.

b. The process for dealing with school-based disputes and complaints is outlined in the flow chart below

Flowchart for Dealing with Disputes and Complaints



"The Director General of the Department of Education is responsible for ensuring the school observes the registration standards, including the standard about its complaints handling system. Any student, parent or community member is entitled to contact the Director General with concerns about how the school has dealt with a complaint. Information is available on the Department of Education website. Whilst the Director General may consider whether the school has breached the registration standards, he does not have power to intervene in a complaint or override the school's decision."

Informal Complaint Resolution

Most issues causing concern can be handled quickly and in an informal manner. In most cases these issues can be resolved through informal discussions with appropriate staff members. Our school welcomes suggestions and comments from parents and takes all concerns, disputes, and complaints seriously. A concern will be treated as a less serious matter that may be resolved with a more informal approach.

A dispute or complaint will be treated as something that requires the formal process to be followed.

We encourage all members of our school community to first treat their issue as a concern when approaching the school and then lodge a formal complaint if this is not handled to their satisfaction. However, in unique circumstances or where a matter involves an immediate risk to the health, safety or wellbeing of a student, the matter should be referred directly to the Principal.

Roles and Responsibilities of Staff in Resolving Complaints and Disputes

School staff and the school leadership are responsible for recording, investigating and resolving complaints and analysing them to identify causes and inform continuous improvement.

Principal

c. The Principal is accountable for ensuring that appropriate and relevant procedures are developed, implemented and reviewed on a regular basis and relevant reporting is completed.
d. He/she is also responsible for ensuring all staff are educated about the school's complaints management procedures and maintaining accurate records in the school's complaints register.
e. The Principal or his/her delegate are authorised to record, investigate and manage complaints. They are required to maintain accurate records in the complaints register and liaise with parties to a dispute or complaint.

Staff Members

f. All staff are authorised to deal with informal complaints or concerns. They are to record the complaint in the school online complaint register and inform the Vice Principal of the complaint. Where a person makes a formal complaint, staff must refer them to the Principal or Vice Principal.

Informal Complaint Resolution

We ask that, where appropriate, you first raise the matter directly with the relevant staff member. If that is not appropriate or the issue was not addressed to your satisfaction, or you simply wish to make a formal complaint you can do so by any of the following means:

g. Lodging a complaint by emailing the principal or vice principal
h. Telephoning the school administration on (08) 63300500

i. Write a letter to the Principal:

Where a dispute or complaint is about the Principal and there is no likelihood that it can be resolved directly with the Principal, the immediate parties may refer the dispute or complaint to the Executive Director of Catholic Education Western Australia Limited (CEWA Ltd).

Anonymous Complaints

It is preferable that the complaint is verifiable, however if a complaint or any other information of unknown origin (i.e. anonymous) provides information that would cause the principal concern, it should be considered by the principal so that they can determine the appropriate course of action.

The dispute or complaint shall be promptly acknowledged in writing, unless the complainant is anonymous and cannot be identified.

The parties to the dispute or complaint shall be notified of the finding(s) of the dispute or complaint, including the basis of the finding(s). There is no duty to notify an anonymous complainant.

Withdrawal of a complaint

Anyone may withdraw a complaint or dispute at any stage of the resolution process. If a complaint is withdrawn, the matter will be deemed to be closed, unless we, at our discretion and in all the circumstances, wish to continue to address a matter raised.

Internal formal resolution procedure

Step 1 – Receiving and recording the complaint

If a staff member receives a complaint, they are required to notify the Principal or Vice Principal of the matter. The details of the complaint must be recorded online using the school's complaints register.

Step 2 – Acknowledge the complaint

All complaints will be acknowledged in writing or email by the complaint handler at the time of receipt or as soon as possible afterwards. The complaint handler will allocate complaints a status, priority and target resolution date.

Step 3 – Assess the complaint and address immediate risks

The Principal/Vice Principal will conduct an investigation into the issues raised, following the principles of procedural fairness, and make a determination.

Where there is an appropriate:

j. CEWA Ltd policy or directive that provides a specific mechanism for addressing the dispute or complaint; or

k. binding legislative or regulator mechanism (including an Enterprise Bargaining Agreement) that addresses the issue raised in the dispute or complaint,

that will be followed.

Parties may involve a support person(s) to assist them in resolving the dispute or complaint.

Step 4 – Resolving complaints

Following the determination, if appropriate, the complaint handler will formulate a resolution and provide a written response to the complainant. The matter will be closed if this response is accepted. Recording the resolution and any additional relevant details in the online complaints register is essential.

Step 5 – Further investigation

If the proposed outcome is not accepted, the matter will be reviewed internally by the principal or the principal's delegate, who may seek additional information or submissions from the relevant parties. The principal or their delegate seek to resolve all disputes within 14 days from the date that the review process is initiated.

The principal may request external assistance and expertise (including mediation), including the involvement of the CEWA Ltd Employment and Community Relations Team to assist in the resolution of a dispute or complaint.

The matter will be closed if the response of the principal, or their delegate, is accepted.

Step 6 – Continuous improvement

All complaints received will be entered into the school's complaints register and, where appropriate, a corrective action request will be made to address any underlying processes which the complaints investigation revealed may require improvement.

Step 7 – External resolution

If the matter remains unresolved, the parties may seek external resolution alternatives – see Reviews and appeals.

Reviews and appeals

Should a complainant be dissatisfied with the outcome of an informal complaint with the involvement of the immediate parties, or if there are unique circumstances, the matter can be referred to the next level by the complainant.

Once a decision has been made, parties may request a review of the decision in accordance with Procedures, including escalating the dispute or complaint to the Executive Director of CEWA Ltd. The Executive Director will investigate the complaint and/or areas of disputation in accordance with the rules of procedural fairness.

The role of the Director General

The Director General of the Department of Education is responsible for ensuring that the school observes the registration standards, including the standard about its complaints handling system. Any student, parent or community member is entitled to contact the Director General with concerns about how the school has dealt with a complaint. Information is available on the Department of Education website. While the Director General may consider whether the school has breached the registration standards, the Director General does not have power to intervene in a complaint or override the school's decision.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality applies with respect to both information relating to the person making the complaint, and if relevant, to a person against whom a complaint is made. Our school is committed to maintaining the confidentiality of information throughout the complaints process.

Personally identifiable information about a complainant will only be made available for the purpose of addressing the complaint and (unless the complainant consents) will be actively protected from disclosure.

Children and young people have the same right to privacy, anonymity and confidentiality as adults. Children and young people may waive their right to privacy and confidentiality if they decide to involve somebody else in the complaints process, e.g. to access support.

If a complainant chooses to make a complaint without disclosing their identity, this will limit the options for proper and thorough investigation and resolution. It also raises issues in relation of procedural fairness for those who have a complaint made against them as they have the right to know of the particulars of the complaint and to respond. The school therefore cannot guarantee that anonymous complaints can or will be dealt with as effectively. Complainants are always encouraged to identify themselves.

As far as possible and appropriate, due discretion will be respected and maintained by all parties throughout the resolution process, save where persons are required to be informed on a 'need to know' basis or where investigative, statutory or legal requirements stipulate that matters be disclosed, reported or discussed. Therefore, there can be no overriding legal obligation or right with respect to confidentiality.

Where complaints are made in circumstances where an alleged crime may have been committed or the matter falls under the CEWA Child Protection Procedures, the WA Police and CEWA Ltd will be contacted and formally advised.

Record keeping

The principal shall maintain appropriate records of the relevant particulars used to make a decision in response to any formal dispute or complaint. Where applicable this will include any statements made by the parties involved.

Reasonable steps are taken to ensure information is stored appropriately and is protected from misuse, modification, unauthorised access and disclosure. The school follows the CEWA Records Disposal Authority Procedure.

CEWA Ltd RDA - Attachment.pdf

Records required as part of an investigation, inquiry or legal process are identified, preserved and not disposed of but retained in secure school storage indefinitely.

Child friendly complaints

The principles that apply to complaints also are applied to complaints and concerns raised by students. Our school is committed to improving the visibility, accessibility and responsiveness of the complaints process for our students.

Students are encouraged to report complaints by talking to someone in the school they feel comfortable with, whether it is a mentor, classroom teacher, a member of the support staff (social worker, counsellor, psychologist, etc), the Principal, Vice Principal or their delegate.

Students can make a complaint in different ways:

- Face to face
- In writing addressed to their Teacher/Vice Principal or Principal

Complaints should be acknowledged at the time of receipt or as soon as possible afterwards. Children and young people are often wary about making a complaint and want to be assured they are being listened to straight away.

Complaints that appear trivial still need to be handled seriously. Young people may test the complaints procedures on relatively minor issues before finding the confidence to raise something painful such as bullying.

In circumstances involving an allegation or complaint in relation to grooming, child abuse and breaches of the Code of Conduct the school will follow the CEWA Child Protection Procedures (Mandatory Reporting), and the matter is reported promptly to the responsible government authorities

Document Title: Complaints and Resolution Procedure				
Approved By	Paul Hille	Next Review Date	02/2027	Printed copies of this document are not controlled.
Originally Released	01/01/2022	Review Frequency Annually	Reviewed	March 2024 May 2025