

**SUNCOAST**  
CHRISTIAN COLLEGE



# **CONCERNS & COMPLAINTS POLICY & PROCEDURES**

This new policy replaces the Complaints Policy & Procedures 2009

**Approved by:** Leadership Team, 11/10/2012  
**Revised Date:**  
**Review Date:** 11/10/2014

*PLEASE NOTE: Version control for this document is managed by the College's Enterprise Risk Management system. Electronic copy is available on the College Intranet or by contacting the Compliance Officer.*

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## 1. Purpose

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The purpose of the Concerns & Complaints Policy & Procedures document is to act as a process for Leadership and staff at Suncoast Christian College, ('the College'), in handling formal complaints.

At the College, we value quality relationships and also recognise that, from time to time, relationships become strained and people are offended by actions, words, or omissions. Unless the matter is dealt with in an appropriate way, relationship may not be restored and the quality of our community is threatened. The Bible deals with a suggested way of resolving differences between people.

## 2. Scope

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- 2.1. This policy and procedure document does not apply to allegations of sexual abuse or harm to children which are dealt with by other policies including the Child Protection Policy.
- 2.2 Any person wishing to make a complaint against the College concerning its conduct, whether a grievance, appeal or other matter, shall have access to the complaints procedure.
- 2.3 All formal complaints will be heard and decided within 15 working days of the receipt of the written complaint by the College. The Principal will keep a 'Register of Complaints', which documents all formal complaints and the resolution.
- 2.3. This policy and procedure document applies to all staff, see definition below.

## 3. Reference documents

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Scripture: Matthew 18:15-17

## 4. Definitions

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- 4.1 **"Concern"**: a real or perceived issue that a person has with the actions of or processes applied by another.
- 4.2 **"Formal Complaint"**: a formal expression of grievance in writing and after a 'concern' has been raised with the person involved.
- 4.3 **"Grievance"**: a real or perceived grounds for concern or formal complaint.
- 4.4 **"Staff" or "staff member"**: all employees of the College, volunteers who access the College, pre-service teachers on the practicum, pre-service teachers on internships and coaches / tutors who are in any way involved with the College and its students.

## 5. Preamble

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- 5.1. This policy and procedure document is an integral part of the Christ-centred community of the College and consistent with the College Values.
- 5.2. It is recognised that parents, students and staff members have a right to raise concerns and to have them addressed appropriately. 'Concerns' and 'Formal Complaints' should be handled objectively and with sensitivity, and not in a reactive or subjective manner.
- 5.3. The policy and procedures in this document are to ensure that complaints will be dealt with in a fair and transparent way which gives account to the legal obligation of the

College in relation to its duty of care to the student, but also guarantees procedural fairness and natural justice to the employee. In the absence of such a policy the College is vulnerable to individual complaint and runs the risk of reacting in a resource-intensive way and being inconsistent in its treatment of individual complaints.

- 5.4. When staff, parents or students have a concern with a staff member or with the College processes and feel the need to raise the concern, the first response should be to speak to the staff member involved. The College values must guide any approach and discussion. If this initial discussion about the concern does not lead to a resolution, then the processes for a 'formal complaint' outlined below should be followed.
- 5.5. Notwithstanding, all informal and formal processes are guided by Biblical principles, with the aim of a fair and just resolution for all parties involved.

## **6. Objectives**

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- 6.1 The determination about whether there has been any unsatisfactory or inappropriate practice or action, as early as possible and in the fairest and most objective manner possible.
- 6.2 The implementation of any necessary changes designed to bring about better educational, pastoral or administrative outcomes, as appropriate.
- 6.3 The achievement of reconciliation between the parties based on open and transparent processes which afford both the staff member and complainant natural justice and procedural fairness.
- 6.4 The establishment of a renewed confidence in the staff / complainant relationship based on attempting to achieve an outcome where concerns have been aired, tested and, if demonstrated to have substance, agreed processes and procedures are implemented by the parties and reviewed over an agreed time line.

## **7. Procedures**

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### **7.1. Concerns**

- 7.1.1 In the first instance, concerns should be taken, by the aggrieved person, to the person who they believe has grieved them. Resolution of the matter between these two individuals would result in an end of the grievance.
- 7.1.2 If resolution is not possible at this level, a mediator, agreed to by both parties, should be appointed to help resolve the grievance (a peer staff member or Head of Department member or Leadership team member).
- 7.1.3 If resolution is not forthcoming, a document of the concern outlining the grievance and the steps that have been taken towards resolution, should be made in writing to the supervisor of the person who the complainant believes has caused the offence.
- 7.1.4 The supervisor is to investigate the matter and make a finding. An initial verbal investigation should be made in an informal manner. In most instances, initial informal discussions lead to improved understandings, better working relationships and agreement for changed work practices.

- 7.1.5 It is a professional expectation of all staff that understanding the viewpoint of all persons involved in an issue, including that of the person who has made the complaint is paramount and therefore deserves the time, and energy to work to create an outcome that fosters better relationships within the community. As a matter of good practice, notes should be kept of such informal discussions as well as any agreed outcome.
- 7.1.6 The Principal reserves the right to make a final decision in the matter.

## **7.2. Formal complaint**

- 7.2.1. When all methods of resolution have been attempted but a suitable outcome cannot be reached, or if it is of a more serious nature, then the concern becomes a 'formal complaint'.
- 7.2.2. Provided that the complaint does not relate to allegations of serious misconduct of sexual, physical or emotional abuse, the parent, staff member or student (if appropriate) who has made the complaint should, in the first instance, submit the complaint in writing to the appropriate Leadership team member, providing sufficient detail for the staff member to understand the nature and context of the complaint.
- 7.2.3. If the complainant is unable by reason of their age or other inability to commit the complaint to writing, then the person who receives the complaint must record the particulars of the complaint in writing on the person's behalf.
- 7.2.4. Where, in the professional judgement of the Principal or appropriate Leadership Team member who has received the complaint, there is a need for a complaint to be addressed, the staff member concerned must be informed and involved.
- 7.2.5. The staff member should then be given the opportunity to respond in writing if they choose to address the written complaint.
- 7.2.6. The Leadership Team member should meet with the staff member, providing at least twenty-four (24) hours' notice of such a meeting and offering the opportunity for the staff member to arrange for a support person to also attend.
- 7.2.7. The Principal or appropriate Leadership Team member should arrange for scribing support to document the discussion. The meeting can either follow the matters raised in the staff member's written response, or the Principal or appropriate Leadership Team member may determine the matters for discussion from the written complaint. This meeting allows for a verbal discussion to ensure that the process of natural justice occurs and to determine whether resolution in accordance with the objectives of this policy can be achieved.
- 7.2.8. If a formal complaint is made about the Principal, the Board Chair assumes the role of the Principal described in the procedures above.

## **7.3. Further discussion necessary**

- 7.3.1 If, following the procedure adopted in item 7.2, the complainant does not feel the matter has been resolved, the complainant should raise the concern with the Principal or appropriate Leadership Team member, and they will either:

- (a) discuss the matter further with the complainant and, where the concern is based on misinformation, misunderstanding or is vexatious or misconceived, clarify the matter with the complainant. In this instance, the staff member concerned should be informed in writing that the complainant further discussed the matter with the Principal or appropriate Leadership Team member and the outcome of their discussion with the parent or student; or
  - (b) discuss the matter further with the complainant and, where the Principal or appropriate Leadership Team member forms the view that the concern is not vexatious nor misconceived, nor based on misinformation / misunderstanding, will discuss the concern with the staff member concerned.
- 7.3.2 Such discussions, meetings and actions arising out of the complaint should be carried out in accordance with the principles outlined in the **Preamble** and **Objectives** of this policy.
- 7.3.3 If after the procedural steps in paragraphs 7.1 and 7.2, the matter of complaint remains unresolved to any party or should matters of disagreement or interpretation be unable to be resolved, the parties shall undertake mediation according to the following procedures:
- (a) where mediation is required the College must appoint a mediator (at its cost) agreed to by the parties involved or failing agreement, a qualified mediator listed by the Queensland Law Society may be appointed;
  - (b) the parties must observe the instructions of the mediator about the conduct of the mediation;
  - (c) the mediation procedure is confidential and neither party can use as evidence in court proceedings any discussions between the parties and the mediator; and
  - (d) if the mediation process has been completed and resolution has not been achieved then the decision as to whether any further action should be taken in relation to the complaint shall be solely in the discretion of the Principal.

#### **7.4. Undertaking**

Staff members against whom complaints are made, undertake not to victimise or seek retribution against any complainant or child of any complainant because a complaint has been made. A breach of this clause may result in disciplinary action.

#### **7.5. Confidentiality**

7.5.1 Confidentiality is a major issue in the handling of complaints. Confidentiality shall be maintained at all stages of the complaint procedures with communication limited to those people who need to be informed in order to resolve the complaint. This does not exclude the staff member from seeking counsel and advice from relevant support structures.

7.5.2 The identity of the person reporting the matter should not be revealed to any third party without the complainant's consent, unless it is required to be disclosed by law or is required for natural justice.

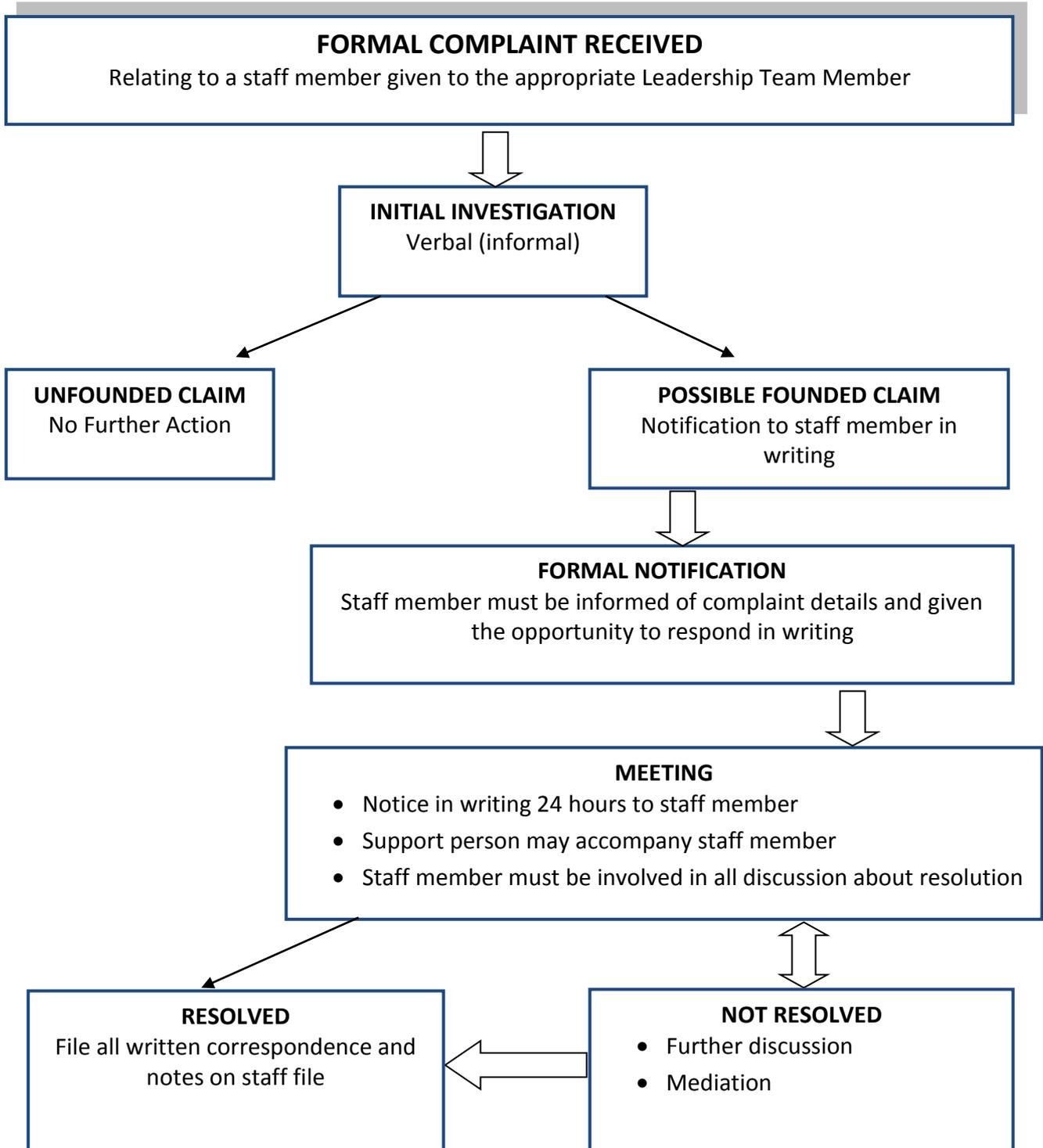
7.5.3 This does not prohibit either party from seeking statements or evidence from people who might provide further evidence about the matter which is the subject of the complaint.

## **7.6. Record keeping**

7.6.1 Records of the complaint, the process for handling the complaint and any outcomes should be kept. Where the complaint is found to be vexatious or based on misinformation etc., any record pertaining to the complaint or handling of the complaint should be kept in a file separate from the staff member concerned and the student.

7.6.2 Where a complaint is addressed or acted on, a copy of any reports related to the handling of the complaint must be given to the staff member concerned. Staff members must have access to the files kept on them by the College according to the Privacy Policy.

**FLOWCHART for FORMAL COMPLAINT**



**UNDERTAKING** – staff members must not victimise or seek retribution against a complainant  
**CONFIDENTIALITY** – all parties must undertake to keep all discussions relating to the complaint confidential