
Concern and Complaint Policy

Date: July 2023

Next Review: July 2026

1. Preamble

- 1.1. At Swan Hill Christian School (SHCS) a high value is placed on sustaining relationships characterised by justice, respect, compassion, honesty, trust and grace within the school community.
- 1.2. As a Christian community, SHCS strives for harmony and good relationships. However, it is recognised that concerns and complaints may arise within the school community from time-to-time and these need to be satisfactorily and promptly resolved. Members of the school community are encouraged to resolve any concern or complaint they may have at the earliest possible opportunity.
- 1.3. It is desired that members of the school community are able to resolve a concern or complaint internally to their satisfaction, without feeling that they have to refer to external organisations or authorities for assistance.
- 1.4. The process of resolving a concern or complaint should always be characterised by love, honesty, respect, fairness, justice, forgiveness and confidentiality.
- 1.5. The purpose of this policy is to set out the principles, guidelines and procedures so all within the SHCS community have a just, effective and efficient process to deal with concerns or complaints they may have from time-to-time.
- 1.6. This policy, together with the procedural documents listed in the details, are to be read and understood by those wishing to make a complaint.

2. Definitions

- 2.1. VRQA - Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority; the statutory body under which the school is registered.

3. Details

- 3.1. This policy (and related procedures) is intended to be conciliatory, non-adversarial and non-legal. This policy will be available on the school's website.
- 3.2. SHCS believes that concerns and complaints are one way in which parents/carers, students and staff are able to provide feedback and so form the basis for future refinements. SHCS undertakes to ensure any concern or complaint is taken seriously and responded to promptly and thoroughly.
- 3.3. SHCS is committed to child safety and has a zero tolerance of child abuse. In the context of this policy, the response to a concern or complaint relating to child safety, particularly any in relation to vulnerable children (for example, children with disability; children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; children unable to live at home; international children; , and children who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender diverse, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ+) and Aboriginal children) will be given the highest priority and attention.
- 3.4. SHCS is committed to ensuring that all involved in a concern or complaint are able to put forward their point of view and will be treated with dignity and respect.

- 3.5. It is SHCS's desire that any concern or complaint is identified and resolved informally. Where this is not possible, SHCS's *Dispute Resolution Policy (Parents)* and *Dispute Resolution Policy (Workplace)* may be required to address more difficult and formal disputes.
- 3.6. In dealing with any concern or complaint, SHCS is committed to acting in a confidential manner and expects that all involved in the matter will do likewise.
- 3.7. When addressing a concern or complaint, it is expected that all parties will:
- raise and discuss issues in a courteous and respectful manner
 - acknowledge that the goal is to achieve an outcome that is in the affected student's best interests and acceptable to all parties
 - seek to respond to and address concerns and complaints in a timely manner
 - act in good faith and respect the privacy and confidentiality of those involved, as appropriate
 - recognise that all parties, including the broader school community, have rights and responsibilities that must be balanced
 - recognise that SHCS may be subject to legal or circumstantial constraints on their ability to act or disclose information in some circumstances.
- 3.8. Where appropriate, SHCS may seek to resolve a concern or complaint by:
- clarification of the circumstances and expectations
 - an apology or expression of regret
 - a change of decision
 - a change of policy, procedure or practice
 - offering the opportunity for student counselling or other support
 - other actions consistent with SHCS's purpose that are intended to support individuals in the school community
- 3.9. It is not always possible to respond to complaints received from an anonymous source and, by definition, not possible for the school to communicate any resolution or response to the person making the complaint.
- 3.10. Any process arising from a concern or complaint will deal with the matter raised by the complaint and not with any other matters.
- 3.11. SHCS is committed to ensuring that any concern or complaint, along with any resulting actions, outcomes and resolution are well documented and retained, and that the school community members concerned have a copy of any final decisions.
- 3.12. Roles and responsibilities**
- 3.12.1. The Board is responsible for:
- determining this policy and reviewing it on a regular basis
 - responding to any formal complaint raised that relates to the Principal
 - responding to an appeal if that is lodged in relation to an unresolved formal complaint
- 3.12.2. The Principal is responsible for:
- determining the complaints procedures and ensuring that they are implemented in a way that is consistent with this policy
 - ensuring the complaints policy is communicated to parents/carers and the wider school and external community via the website

- retaining a register of formal complaints (listing the date, subject and resolution) for reporting to the governing board on an annual basis and to be available to VRQA as required.

3.12.3. Members of staff are responsible for responding to and resolving a concern and complaint raised informally, in line with this policy.

3.12.4. Parents/Carers are responsible to know and adhere to this policy when dealing with any concern or complaint.

3.12.5. Students are responsible to know and adhere to this policy when dealing with any concern or complaint.

3.13. Process for Parent/Carers Concern or Complaint

3.13.1. Staff at SHCS will be available to discuss any concern or complaint parents/carers may have. The table following seeks to identify which person within the school is best suited to deal with a parent/carer's concern or complaint.

Issue	Who to contact	Method of Communication
Classroom activities, class curriculum	Your child's teacher	Telephone, email, arrange an appointment
Friendship issues	Your child's teacher	Telephone, email, arrange an appointment
Complex student issues	Principal	In writing by email (or letter). Email or telephone to arrange an appointment
Concern about a staff member	Principal	In writing by email (or letter). Email or telephone to arrange an appointment
School policy	Principal	In writing by email (or letter). Email or telephone to arrange an appointment
School fees and payments	Principal or Business Manager	In writing by email (or letter). Email or telephone to arrange an appointment

3.13.2. Where a parent/carer does not consider the concern or complaint appropriately resolved, they are invited to make an appointment to raise the matter with the Principal.

3.13.3. It may happen that resolution is still not reached, even after sustained effort and despite following the steps outlined above. In such circumstances, formal complaint proceedings will need to take place in order to bring about some form of resolution regarding at least the substantive issues of the disagreement or conflict.

3.13.4. Formal Complaint Proceedings are detailed in Section 7 of SHCS's *Dispute Resolution (Parents) Policy* and can be directed to the Principal.

3.13.5. Where a disagreement or conflict involves the Principal, the matter should be referred in writing directly to the Board Chair.

3.14. Process for Student Concern or Complaint

3.14.1. SHCS is committed to ensuring students know how to raise a concern or complaint with school staff and that these will be taken seriously and dealt with.

3.14.2. IF the disagreement is with a staff member, please see the Principal. Where a disagreement or conflict involves the Principal, the matter should be referred in writing directly to the Board Chair

3.14.3. Material for students will be presented in age-and-stage-appropriate ways and be accessible to all students that explain how students can raise a concern in the first instance: with whom and in what way.

3.14.4. Any material developed will be along the following lines:

- Sometimes things may go wrong at school that may mean you are worried or unhappy
- Teachers want to talk with you about these problems and help you find an answer
- It is important to share your problem with a teacher quickly
- You are able to talk to any teacher about any problem

4. Guidelines for staff in dealing with Student Concern and Complaint

4.1. SHCS will encourage and support students to raise a concern or complaint with staff at an early stage so that issues can be resolved quickly.

4.2. Staff are encouraged to resolve issues as quickly and as simply as possible. This may mean:

- where possible, the member of staff who receives the concern or complaint should deal with it themselves rather than escalate the matter
- some matters, however, need to be escalated and require a swift response.

4.3. Matters that require escalation may include:

- anything to do with child safe standards that must be dealt with under the school's *Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy*
- Matters that allege misconduct or illegal behaviour
- Issues that have a wider school or systemic implication.

4.4. Complaints that must be recorded in a file note and be retained as part of the school's records might include those concerning:

- the effectiveness of teaching at the school
- bullying, racial or sexual harassment
- a child's persistent unhappiness or concern for their wellbeing
- any form of discrimination.

5. Guidelines for staff in dealing with Parent/Carer Concern and Complaint

5.1. SHCS expects that any parent/carers should receive an acknowledgment of the concern or complaint within twenty-four [24] hours, even if it then takes longer to arrange a meeting or a phone call.

5.2. Staff are encouraged to resolve issues as quickly and as simply as possible. Where possible, the member of staff who receives the concern or complaint should deal with it themselves rather than escalate the matter.

5.3. Some matters, however, need to be escalated and require a swift response. Such matters are likely to include:

- anything to do with child safe standards that must be dealt with under the school's *Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy*
- matters that allege misconduct, corruption or illegal behaviour
- complaints against a staff member
- privacy issues that must be dealt with under the school's *Privacy Policy*
- legal issues and requests for compensation or payments
- issues that have a wider school or systemic implication.

5.4. Complaints that must be recorded in a file note and be retained as part of the school's records might include those concerning:

- the effectiveness of the teaching at the school
- bullying, racial or sexual harassment
- a child's persistent unhappiness or concern for their wellbeing
- any form of discrimination

6. **Record keeping**

6.1. It is important that consistent, well-structured, concise and complete information is on file for current and future use. These records will be maintained in line with SHCS's *Record Management Policy*.

6.2. In some situations, parents/carers may be provided with a copy of the record of the complaint.

6.3. The following documentation will form the record of the complaint:

- a record of the initial concern or complaint, and the means by which the school became aware of it
- the name of any people named in the initial concern or complaint
- a record of any meeting/s held, and any matters progressed
- a record of any resolution
- a record of any further actions or meetings.

6.4. The management of any records will follow the school's *Record Retention Schedule*.