Melbourne Archdiocese
Catholic Schools

Complaints Handling Policy for MACS Schools

1. Introduction

Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools Ltd (**MACS**) is a company limited by guarantee established in 2021 by the Archbishop of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne to assume the governance and operation of MACS schools across the Archdiocese of Melbourne. MACS subsequently established Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Specialist Schools Ltd (**MACSS**) to provide educational services to children with diverse needs and Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools Early Years Education (**MACSEYE**) to provide early years care and education services.

The Statement of Mission in the MACS Constitution, and the constitutions of its subsidiaries, MACSS and MACSEYE, sets out the Archbishop's expectations of Catholic schooling in the Archdiocese and provides an important context and grounding for the company and the direction which the MACS Board must always observe in the pursuit of the company's objects.

The Board must ensure that all policies and procedures concerning the operations of MACS, and its subsidiaries are consistent with the Statement of Mission and company objects, as well as any directions issued by the Archbishop from time to time.

2. Background

MACS values and encourages open and positive relationships within school communities. We understand that it is in the best interests of students for there to be a trusting relationship between families and our schools. Timely and professional responses to complaints is an effective means of encouraging communication, building trust and resolving issues for the betterment of all concerned.

3. Purpose

This policy is to ensure that best practice occurs for reporting, recording, managing and reviewing complaints and their outcomes. It provides surety and support for all stakeholders through what can be a difficult process.

4. Scope

This policy relates to complaints raised by students, parents or carers or members of MACS school communities. It applies to matters relating to MACS schools, including specialist schools operated by MACSS and school boarding premises operated by MACS schools, or the behaviour of any person within a MACS school, including employees, volunteers, contractors, families, students subject to the exclusions listed below.

4.1. Matters outside the scope of this policy

Queries, concerns around day to day operations

Parents and students may have queries, concerns or require clarification about areas of school operations. These matters are not considered complaints and MACS encourages staff to work collaboratively with students, parents and carers, and members of the school community to resolve these matters informally with the wellbeing of students in mind. If a matter cannot be resolved in this manner, then it may be escalated and become a complaint and this policy, and its procedures will apply.

Misconduct or serious misconduct

All complaints about alleged misconduct or serious misconduct by the teacher, staff member or volunteer should be reported to the principal.

Complaints about teachers can also be reported to the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) – the regulator in relation to the registration and investigation of serious misconduct (including conduct which is of a physical or emotional nature) of all teachers in Victoria. If there is uncertainty around whether the complaint constitutes serious misconduct by a teacher, VIT can be contacted on 1300 888 067 or vit@vit.vic.edu.au.

In some cases, certain actions which involve physical or emotional misconduct, such as unlawful assault or threats to the person, may constitute a criminal offence. These types of offences should be reported to and investigated by Victoria Police. Initial consultation with the principal may help to determine the appropriate course of action in these circumstances.

Child abuse (including sexual offences)

Child abuse includes any instances of physical or sexual abuse (including grooming), emotional or psychological harm, serious or significant neglect and family violence involving a child.

Complaints of alleged child abuse, including sexual offences, or children or school students should be reported to the principal of the school and the processes outlined in the Child Abuse Identification and Response Policy and Procedures will be used to address the matter.

There are legal obligations on all adults to report child abuse to the police once a reasonable belief is formed that a sexual offence may have been committed against a child by an adult. Failure to disclose a sexual offence against a child is a criminal offence under section 327 of the *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic) and applies to all adults (18 years of age and over) in Victoria. Communication with children under 16 years of age by teachers, staff or any other person to prepare or groom a child for future sexual activity is a criminal offence under section 49M (1) of the Crimes Act and must be reported to the police. The offence of grooming applies to any person aged 18 years or over and does not apply to communication between people who are both under 18 years of age.

If you are concerned that MACS does not comply with the Child Safe Standards, you can contact the Social Services Regulator.

Reportable conduct

Legal obligations are imposed on the MACS Head of Entity to report to the Social Services Regulator and investigate allegations of reportable conduct, where those allegations are based on a person's reasonable belief that reportable conduct or misconduct involving reportable conduct has occurred. Reportable conduct includes the following:

- sexual offences against, with or in the presence of a child
- sexual misconduct against, with or in the presence of a child
- physical violence against, with or in the presence of a child
- behaviour that causes significant psychological or emotional harm
- significant neglect

Complaints relating to reportable conduct allegations involving any person who carries out work in any capacity for MACS and its subsidiaries must be reported. Complaints about staff other than the principal should be reported to the principal in the school. Complaints about a principal in a MACS school should be reported to the General Manager (Region). More information can be found in the Reportable Conduct Policy.

Complaints against clergy or those involved in religious ministry

If the complaint relates to clergy or other persons involved in religious ministry in the school, the complainant should contact and seek advice from the Professional Standards Unit of the Vicar General's Office in the Archdiocese of Melbourne, 383 Albert Street East Melbourne on 03 9926 5677. If the person is a member of a religious order, the complainant should also contact the provincial head or professional standards office of that congregation or religious order. If the complaint about clergy or other persons involved in religious ministry relates to child safety or reportable conduct allegations, the relevant processes for child abuse and reportable conduct must also be followed. The Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne has a Safeguarding Policy.

5. Principles

MACS is committed to building school communities that feature positive and respectful relationships that support the learning and development of students and value the innate dignity of each person.

MACS schools will promote the education and wellbeing of students and collaboration with families and the school community through a clear and accessible complaints process in each school.

Positive outcomes can be achieved when everyone works together in good faith and in a respectful manner.

MACS is committed to empowering students to participate and where possible, to be part of decision-making that affects their education and outcomes.

6. Raising a complaint

If a parent or carer, student or member of the school community has previously raised a matter informally, and the matter was not resolved, that parent, student or member of the school community (complainant) may wish to make a complaint.

A complaint is a formal expression of dissatisfaction with an action taken, decision made, service provided or handling of an issue in a MACS school.

7. When complaints are received

Complaints received in MACS schools will be taken seriously and responded to in a timely manner, as set out in each school's Complaints Handling Procedures. Complaints will be managed in a culturally safe and sensitive manner, taking into consideration the diverse circumstances of students and families. Support will be provided to vulnerable students and families.

MACS schools will abide by the principles of procedural fairness and provide an opportunity for complainants and the subject of complaints to be heard.

Principals may develop internal complaints handling process that support this Complaints Handling Policy and School Complaints Handling Procedures.

8. Anonymous complaints

MACS endeavours to address and respond to all complaints. In some situations, it may not be possible to fully address complaints that are made anonymously or without sufficient detail being provided to enable a review or resolution of the matter.

To ensure procedural fairness, respondents have a right to know the particulars of allegations being made against them and to be given an opportunity to respond accordingly. Where possible, complainants are encouraged to provide their names and to be reassured that MACS will deal with complaints professionally and in accordance with procedural fairness and confidentiality.

9. Providing feedback to MACS schools

MACS values the feedback provided by school communities. There are many opportunities to provide feedback to a MACS school. These may include:

- parent surveys
- scheduled parent forums
- arranged meetings with the Principal or other staff to express concerns
- other avenues and opportunities communicated through the school or MACS

10. Information sharing

MACS schools are prescribed Information Sharing Entities (ISE) that may share information under the Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS) or the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS). As an ISE, a MACS school may receive complaints from individuals about its conduct as

an ISE under the CISS or FVISS. It may also receive a complaint from another ISE. Appropriate procedures to protect the privacy of personal information are in place.

The following information is recorded when a complaint is received under the CISS or FVISS:

- date the complaint was made and received
- nature of the complaint
- action taken to resolve the complaint
- action taken to lessen or prevent the issue from recurring
- time taken to resolve the complaint
- further action taken if the complaint was not resolved

11. Recordkeeping obligations and complaints monitoring

Records of complaints are kept, maintained and stored by MACS in accordance with policies and procedures for information and records management, storage and disposal, requirements set out in the Child Safety Standards Ministerial Order 1359 and, any Public Record Office of Victoria Record keeping Standards that may be applicable to non-government schools. Records of complaints are used to monitor school operations and to identify areas where improvements may be required.

12. Roles and reporting responsibilities

Role	Responsibility	Reporting requirement
Principal	Consideration of complaints made about a MACS school	To be recorded in the school's complaints register.
Principal	Publication of the complaints handling policy and procedures	Annual attestation to the Executive Director.
General Manager (Region)	Consideration of complaints escalated to the regional office by principals or external authorities	To be recorded in the MACS complaints handling system. Reporting to MACS office and external authorities as required.
General Manager (Region)	Consideration of complaints about Principals in MACS schools	To be recorded in the MACS complaints handling system.

13. Procedures

Principals are required to document the school's procedures to support this policy using the MACS approved template.

14. Definitions

Definitions of standard terms used in this Policy can be found in the Glossary of Terms..

Complaint

A formal expression of dissatisfaction with an action taken, decision made, service provided or handling of an issue.

Complainant

The person or persons who have raised a Complaint with the school.

15. Related policies and documents

Supporting documents

School Complaints Handling Procedures

Related MACS policies and documents

Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy
Child Safety and Wellbeing Procedures
Child Safety Recordkeeping Procedures
Code of Conduct for MACS Staff
Code of Conduct – Parents
Code of Conduct – Students
Enrolment Policy
Privacy Policy
Child Abuse Identification and Response Policy
Reportable Conduct Policy
Student Behaviour Support Policy
Student Bullying Prevention and Support Policy
Whistleblower Policy

16. Legislation and standards

Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)
Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)
Education and Training Reform Act 2007 (Vic)
Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017 (Vic)

Policy information

Sponsoring Executive	Director, Education Excellence
Policy owner	General Manager, Child Safety
Approving authority	MACS Board
Assigned board committee	Child Safety and Risk Management
Approval date	23 June 2026
Risk Rating	Extreme
Review by	June 2028
Publication	MACS website, Gabriel, CEVN, school website

POLICY DATABASE INFORMATION	
Assigned framework	Complaints and Complex Issues
Supporting documents	See list of supporting documents above
Superseded documents	Complaints Handling Policy for MACS Schools – v4.0 - 2023 Complaints Handling Policy for MACS Schools – v3.0 - 2022 Complaints Handling Policy for MACS Schools v2.0 – 2022 MACS Complaints Handling Policy for Schools – v1.0 – 2021 Complaints Handling Policy – Template for Schools – 2023 Complaints Handling Policy – Template for Schools – 2022 School Complaints Handling Policy - 2021