



# St Mary's College Complaints Handling

## Policy and Procedures

### Introduction

St Mary's College welcomes feedback from all members of the college community and takes all complaints and concerns that are raised seriously.

### Purpose

This policy is designed to assist all members of the college community including parents, guardians, carers and students to understand how to make a complaint and outline the College's approach to managing complaints.

### Scope

This Policy and Procedure applies to the school environment, which includes, any campus of the College, online and virtual environments and other locations provided by the College or through a third-party provider for a child or student. This Policy applies to all College employees, students, parents and guardians, third party service providers, volunteers and contractors involved in the school environment.

This Policy and Procedure does not cover complaints regarding:

- child safety – concerns and complaints must then be addressed in accordance with the College's child safeguarding policies and procedures
- employment – concerns and complaints must be addressed in accordance with the Internal Grievance Policy, Occupational Health and Safety Policy and Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying Policy. Questions also can be directed to the HR Manager.
- whistleblower disclosures – concerns or disclosures must be addressed in accordance with EREA Whistleblower Protection Policy
- enrolment – concerns or complaints must be addressed in accordance with the St Mary's College Enrolment Policy

### Principles

The College commits to the following guiding principles in dealing with complaints:

- The College ensures that its complaints procedures are straightforward and accessible. Complaints may be submitted verbally or in writing to accommodate all stakeholders.
- The College prepares reports on complaints, which are reviewed by the Principal and submitted to the Risk & Compliance Committee for oversight.
- The College treats all complaint-related information as strictly confidential, ensuring privacy and discretion.
- The College views complaints as valuable feedback and uses them to enhance its processes and systems.
- The College prioritises stakeholders' concerns, encourages feedback, and is committed to resolving complaints in a timely and fair manner.

- Each complaint is handled fairly, objectively, and without bias by an impartial individual. All parties have the right to be heard, and decisions will be communicated with clear reasoning. The College upholds principles of procedural fairness and natural justice in resolving complaints.
- When dealing with a complaint, we aim to restore relationships which may have broken down.

### Responsibilities

**St Mary's College Complaints Officers** are responsible for:

- investigating and, where necessary, escalating Formal Complaints when requested by the complainant, other than child safeguarding-related complaints
- where necessary, escalating complaints to the appropriate VSL Complaints Officer
- liaising with complainants and frontline staff
- maintaining accurate records in the Complaints Register
- regularly reporting to the Leadership Team about complaints
- ensuring systemic complaints are identified and rectified
- monitoring the effectiveness of, and continually improving, our Complaints Handling Program.

Our Complaints Officers are:

Name	Position	Contact No.	Email
Fiona Mulhall	Deputy Principal	9529 6611	<a href="mailto:fmulhall@stmaryscollege.vic.edu.au">fmulhall@stmaryscollege.vic.edu.au</a>
Tristan McGlade	Business Manager	9529 6611	<a href="mailto:tmcglade@stmaryscollege.vic.edu.au">tmcglade@stmaryscollege.vic.edu.au</a>

**The Principal or delegate** is responsible for:

- approving this and reviewing this Policy
- effective implementation of this Policy
- ensuring this Policy is made available on the College's website
- ensuring that all staff are educated about our Complaints Handling Program
- responding to complaints related to the School Advisory Council
- where necessary, escalating complaints to the appropriate VSL Complaints Officer

**Staff** have a responsibility to receive and document complaints, managing informal complaints at the appropriate level. Staff are expected to pass on Formal complaints to the relevant Complaints Officer.

**The Edmund Rice Education Australia Victorian Schools Ltd (VSL) Board** is responsible for maintaining oversight of all escalated complaints and responding to formal complaints about VSL

**The VSL Chief Executive Officer** is responsible for managing formal complaints about the Principal or VSL staff

**The VSL Complaints Officer** is responsible for managing formal complaints escalated to VSL from the College

- are kept informed of progress throughout the resolution process.
- The College ensures that parents and community members are aware of the complaints procedure and how to lodge a complaint.
- When dealing with a complaint, we aim to restore relationships which may have broken down.

### Child Safety and Safeguarding-Related Complaints

All complaints related to child safety and safeguarding are treated as formal complaints and processed under the Child Safety and Safeguarding Program, rather than this policy. Our Child Safeguarding Policies and Procedures, which are available on our public website, explains how the College manages child safeguarding-related complaints, as well as any child safety incidents or concerns that occur at the College or College events, or that involve students, staff members, Visitors or other members of the college community.

## Making a Complaint

There is no fee associated with making a complaint.

We will support and provide practical assistance to complainants to make a complaint and throughout the complaints process.

We insist on all complainants being respectful to and cooperating with staff as a prerequisite to the management of their complaint.

## Procedures

### Informal Complaint

Most issues causing concern in schools can be handled quickly and in an informal manner. We therefore ask that, where appropriate, you first raise your concern directly with the relevant staff member.

Even if the issue is resolved informally, the relevant staff member will log it through our complaints management system so that we are able to identify any systemic issues arising and take appropriate rectification action.

### Formal Complaint

If you have been unable to resolve a matter informally, or if you otherwise wish to make a formal complaint, you can do so in the following ways:

- Complete the VSL SCHOOL Complaints Form
- Send an email to the Complaints Officer (listed above)
- Write a letter to the College addressed to the Complaints Officer
- Telephone the College and ask to speak to the Complaints Officer or relevant person

All formal complaints are logged through our online complaints management system and managed in accordance with the procedure in this document.

### Complaints from Students

The College encourages students to raise concerns with their teachers at an early stage so that issues can be resolved quickly. Any concerns and complaints can be raised by students directly with a member of staff. If a student is unsure how to raise a complaint, they can approach any member of staff for direction.

### Complaint about the Principal

Complaints about the Principal are managed by VSL and should be addressed to the Chief Executive Officer, Edmund Rice Education Victorian Schools Ltd and emailed to [complaints@erea.vic.edu.au](mailto:complaints@erea.vic.edu.au).

### Anonymous Complaints

Complaints may be made anonymously or using a pseudonym. However, we are unable to provide anonymous complainants with feedback on the progress and outcome of their complaint. It may also limit our ability to fully investigate the complaint if we are unable to contact you to obtain further details.

### Our Internal Complaints Handling Process

The following process is a guide only and may be varied by the College as circumstances require:

All formal complaints, except those made anonymously, are acknowledged in writing, as soon as practicable, and allocated a status, a priority and a target resolution date. We will keep in regular contact with the complainant prior to the target resolution date, advising of the status of the matter and each time confirming when the next communication should be expected.

The Complaints Officer (if the complaint is not about the Principal or the person responsible for investigating the complaint) will conduct an investigation into the issues raised, following principles of procedural fairness.

The investigation may involve:

- providing an opportunity for the complainant to fully communicate the complaint in detail
- if the complaint is about a staff member, providing details of the complaint to them and seeking their response.
- accessing any other relevant information in relation to the complaint.

Following the investigation, if appropriate, the Complaints Officer (or if the complaint is about the Principal, the VSL Complaints Officer), will formulate a resolution and, unless the complaint was anonymous, provide a written response to the complainant. If the complainant accepts this response, the matter is noted as “resolved” and closed.

All complaints received are entered into our Complaints Register and, where appropriate, corrective actions will be made to address any underlying processes which the complaints investigation revealed may require improvement.

Complaints may be resolved in various ways, depending on the circumstances. Possible outcomes include:

- Withdrawal of the complaint, either verbally or in writing.
- A verbal or written apology from the College or relevant staff member.
- Actions taken to correct or address the issue raised.
- Disciplinary measures for a student or staff member, if appropriate.

If the complainant accepts the College’s response, the matter is noted as “resolved” and closed.

#### Procedural Fairness in Complaints Handling

It is critically important that throughout the entire complaints handling process, procedural fairness is accorded to the complainant and the person/s who are the subject of the complaint.

Procedural fairness in complaints handling requires:

- both the complainant and the person against whom the complaint is made to have the opportunity to be heard, in person or in writing as appropriate, and to respond to the allegations and/or evidence offered by the other
- an objective investigation of issues or facts which are in dispute
- that the investigator is free from bias, or the perception of bias, and is not ‘judge in his or her own cause’
- that any complaint outcome is supported by the evidence, necessitating a finding on the balance of probabilities in the event of a dispute of fact
- that the complaint outcome is finalised by an adjudicator, who may also be the investigator, who is free from bias or the perception of bias
- that the outcome is consistent with the College’s established policies and/or procedures relevant to the complaint.

While it is the College’s policy that these elements of procedural fairness are to be applied to each complaint received by the College, procedural fairness should not otherwise dictate the outcome of a complaint.

#### Internal Review

If a complainant is dissatisfied with the College’s resolution, they may request an internal review. To initiate this process, the complainant must:

1. **Submit a written request** – The complainant must submit a written request for an internal review to the Principal, outlining the reasons for their dissatisfaction and any additional relevant information.

2. **Acknowledgment of request** – The Principal will acknowledge receipt of the request as soon as practicable.
3. **Review by the Principal or delegate** – The Principal or their delegate will assess the complaint, which may include seeking further information or submissions from relevant parties.
4. **Resolution timeline** – The internal review will be completed within 14 working days from the date it is initiated.
5. **Outcome notification** – The complainant will receive a written response outlining the outcome of the review. If the complainant accepts the decision, the matter is noted as "resolved" and closed.

If the matter remains unresolved, and/or the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome or the way that the complaint has been managed, the complainant or the Principal may escalate the complaint to VSL ([complaints@ere.vic.edu.au](mailto:complaints@ere.vic.edu.au)). Escalated complaints are managed in accordance with VSL's Complaints Management Policy.

### Confidentiality and Privacy

The College ensures confidentiality throughout the complaints process. Information about the complainant and any person named in the complaint is only shared as necessary to address the issue and is otherwise protected from disclosure. Staff must not discuss complaints with unauthorized individuals. All written communications related to complaints remain confidential.

The College follows the Australian Privacy Principles, allowing complainants to remain anonymous and request access to or amendments of their personal information, subject to the Privacy Act (Cth).

### Definitions

#### Complaint

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction made to the College, related to our services or operations, or the complaints handling process itself, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected.

A complaint may be made by a student, parent/carer, former student, parent/carer of a former student, member of the wider college community, authority or a member of the public generally. A complaint can also be made anonymously.

#### Complainant

We refer to anyone who makes a complaint as a "complainant". They could be a natural person, an organisation, or a representative of an organisation.

#### Informal complaint

A concern or issue raised verbally or in writing that can be quickly resolved through discussion or minor intervention, without the need for a formal investigation.

### Source of Obligation

A school must have policies and procedures to provide students with a safe environment where the risk of harm is minimised, and students feel safe. The College is responsible for ensuring all staff are aware of their legal obligations.

This includes policies and procedures for managing complaints and grievances and evidence of how the College's policies and procedures:

- ensure procedural fairness
- are accessible to the College community and are consistent with the school's enrolment agreement

### Policy Administration

<b>Responsible Officer</b>	<b>Principal</b>
Policy Owner	EREA VSL
Approving Body	Principal
Approval Date	March 2025
Risk Rating	High
Date of next review	March 2027

<b>Policy Database Information</b>	
Version	
Related Documents	Child Safeguarding Reporting and Responding Obligations Policy and Procedures Occupational Health & Safety Policy EREA VSL Complaints Management Policy
Superseded Documents	St Mary's College Complaints Handling Program