CONCERNS & COMPLAINTS POLICY

St Francis Xavier College
Berwick, Beaconsfield & Officer
Established May, 2008
Ratified by College Board, November, 2008
Reviewed June, 2011 (no changes required)
Ratified by College Board, June, 2011
KEY PRINCIPLES

The key principles for the handling expressions of serious concern at St Francis Xavier College are:

The College is open to the concerns of parents, caregivers and students

Complaints are received in a positive manner

Parents, caregivers and students can expect to be taken seriously and can approach any member of staff about their concerns

Information about the complaints procedure is clear and readily available

Concerns are dealt with speedily and those who have raised them are kept informed about progress

It is not acceptable for students to receive adverse treatment because they or their parents and caregivers have raised a complaint

Precise confidential files and a log are kept

Confidentiality is respected and maintained as far as is possible

Resolution of the matter is sought where appropriate

Staff training covers the handling of complaints
PREAMBLE

In a Catholic school, pastoral care involves concern for the growth of both staff and students.

The purpose of the St Francis Xavier College Concerns & Complaints Policy is to promote the pastoral care of teachers and students, as well as meeting our obligations of addressing the legitimate concerns of parents, caregivers, students and colleagues.

This policy recognises that if there is a practice which is detrimental to the students’ welfare or learning, then this situation or incident needs to be addressed and changes made to this practice.

In order to meet a standard of best practice St Francis Xavier College has developed this complaints procedure to help resolve and where possible avoid potential problems.

The term Staff is defined as the Principal, Deputy Principal/s, Directorial staff, House Coordinators, Learning Area Leaders, Pastoral/Welfare/Support staff, Care Group or subject teachers.

WHERE COMPLAINTS MAY COME FROM

Complaints may emanate from:

(a) parents (and caregivers)
(b) students
(c) the public
(d) staff

AN OPEN COMMUNITY: CLIMATE AND CULTURE

In order to develop an open organisation it is essential that all members of the College community feel that the College is open to their concerns. The interests of the College are better served when parents and caregivers are able to express their concerns directly to a member of staff as opposed to sharing their dissatisfaction with others. It is important that parents feel valued and involved with the College and they are encouraged to express their views.

Our College community is one:

☐ that listens to parents, caregivers and students
☐ where parents and caregivers feel comfortable in contacting staff.
☐ where staff are comfortable in dealing with complaints.

An effective complaints procedure can diffuse problems and can provide the College with helpful information. Concerns treated as constructive suggestions can be used to improve standards and may prevent cause for further complaint. Even unjustified complaints may indicate areas that can be improved.
WHAT CONSTITUTES A COMPLAINT?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem.

A complaint may be made if that person thinks that there are areas within the College community that warrant concern.

**All complaints need to be handled seriously.** A gentle expression of concern, or a simple query, may grow into a major matter if the complainant feels that he / she has not been taken seriously or has been brushed aside. Often matters that have the potential to escalate can be resolved if they are handled well in the initial stage.

Procedures need to be flexible to handle both formal complaints and the informal raising of issues.

Complaints against members of staff need particularly sensitive handling. All complaints need to be recorded. Distinction should be made between a serious complaint and a simple query.

LINES OF APPROACH

As St Francis Xavier College supports a House Pastoral Care system, the parent or caregiver would normally make initial contact to the Care Group teacher or the House Coordinator. In instances of more serious concern an appropriate member of the Directorial staff is to be informed of any parent or caregiver complaints. This senior staff member will ensure that the matter is brought to the attention of the Deputy Principal or Principal.

If staff are approached about a matter that lies outside their area of responsibility it should be referred to the appropriate person. The parents or caregivers who made the complaint are to be informed when a matter is referred.

Matters incapable of resolution at a particular level should be referred to the appropriate senior staff member, with parents and caregivers kept informed of the action being taken. Senior staff will refer those issues that need to go directly to the Deputy Principal, with whom lies the responsibility for more serious concerns.

There may be some who will wish to go directly to the Principal with their concerns. This should be requested through the Personal Assistant to the Principal. However, the Principal may refer the concern to the level that he believes is most appropriate.

Responses to issues of serious concern will be communicated by the College Principal in verbal or letter form only- not electronic/email.

REDUCING ANXIETY

As the person expressing concern may feel vulnerable, the College can reduce anxiety by taking the matter seriously and dispelling uncertainty about how the complaint will be handled.

The following factors will assist in reducing anxiety:

- Information about the complaints procedure should be clear.
Complaints are to be acknowledged as soon as is practical, but within a maximum of five days. Staff are to inform parents or caregivers as to what is happening to their concern or complaint and, if a more detailed response is needed, by what date it should be received. The issue is to be dealt with as quickly as possible.

The nature of the complaint and what is concerning the complainant should be clear:

- If it is not immediately obvious the parents or caregivers may need more time to explain.
- If the concern is deemed to be of a serious nature, the complainant will be asked to put that concern in writing.
- It may be helpful to discuss possible outcomes.

**RECORDING**

The College is to keep an effective log of serious concerns. This may be required because:

- it may become the cause of future legal action;
- patterns in the record may indicate a need for action;
- the Principal should be able to check the log regularly.

The log, to be maintained by the Personal Assistant to the Principal, is to contain the following:

- date when the issue was raised;
- name of all parties involved;
- brief statement of the issue;
- member of staff handling the issue; and
- brief statement of the outcome.

Records of the complaint, the process for handling the complaint and any outcomes will 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 will be kept in a file separate from the teacher or staff member concerned and the student.

Where a complaint is addressed or acted on, a copy of any reports related to the handling of the complaint will be provided to the teacher or staff member concerned. Teachers and members of staff will have access to the files kept on them by the College.

Policy and procedures at St Francis Xavier College will be consistent with the procedures outlined in the Catholic Education Office Melbourne (CEOM) Policy 2.3

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

Confidentiality is an important issue for students, parents, caregivers and staff. It is essential that any complaint be treated in a confidential manner and with respect.

Complainants often seek an assurance of confidentiality before expressing their concerns. It should be made clear to all concerned that it is the College’s policy that complaints made by parents and caregivers are not to rebound adversely on their
children and similarly complaints raised by students should not rebound on them or
on other students.

The question of confidentiality will be discussed sensitively and on an individual basis
with the complainant. The College’s policy is to be carefully explained.

Members of staff are rightly concerned that they should know about complaints that
might be damaging to their reputation. Such complaints will be made known to them
and those who may need to be consulted.

Confidentiality is a major issue in the handling of complaints. Confidentiality shall be
maintained at all stages of the complaint procedure with communication limited to
those people who need to be informed in order to resolve the complaint.

Members of our College community are encouraged to give their names and should
be given reassurance on the issue of confidentiality. Anonymous complaints will not
be acted upon officially.

RESOLUTION

Sometimes the very acknowledgment of an issue by the College brings peace of
mind to parents and caregivers. Satisfactory resolution may come from any of the
following:

- knowing that changes have been made, and that matters will be different in
  the future
- knowing that the College is now alert to a possible problem
- feeling that their concerns have been considered seriously
- an outcome which may be different from the one sought, but which
  is perceived to be well-considered
- a considered letter
- an apology

If time is required to consider matters of serious concern, parents should receive a
report letter. This should cover:

- the issues raised
- how the issues were considered
- the people consulted
- action that is to be taken
- an apology, if appropriate

INTRACTABLE COMPLAINTS

Most complaints can be resolved if approached positively. If a complaint becomes
intractable it is the responsibility of the Principal to come to a decision that is
appropriate for the welfare of all parties concerned.

TRAINING

The College will provide access to training to help staff deal not only with complaints
made to them, but also to complaints that are made about them.
The College is also aware there is a need to provide support for staff against whom a complaint is made.

Training should encompass:

- the complaints procedure
- communication skills, such as listening, questioning and calming
- handling complaints, negotiation and mediation skills
- skills in observing, recording and reporting
- the benefits of handling complaints well
- the necessity to seek advice from experienced colleagues.

A LEAFLET FOR PARENTS

A leaflet explaining the recommended avenues for expressing concerns at St. Francis Xavier College is attached. This leaflet is to be provided to parents at the point of enrolment at the College and is published in the *St Francis Xavier College Rights and Responsibilities* booklet. Additional copies of the leaflet are available for collection at Reception and Student Services.

STUDENT COMPLAINTS

The principles that apply to parental complaints also apply to complaints and concerns from students.

There are, however, differences in approaches. One important difference is that students should be able to raise concerns with any member of staff with whom they feel comfortable.

In more complex situations, once the matter is resolved, a member of staff, designated by the Principal, should discuss the outcome with the student.

A LEAFLET FOR STUDENTS

A leaflet explaining the recommended avenues for expressing concerns at St. Francis Xavier College is attached. This leaflet is to be provided to students at the point of enrolment at the College and is published in the *St Francis Xavier College Rights and Responsibilities* booklet. Additional copies of the leaflet are available for collection at Reception and Student Services.

CONCLUSION

If a concern or complaint is dealt with seriously and sensitively at an early stage, it is likely to have a satisfactory outcome. A healthy complaints procedure is an integral part of the Catholic ethos and values of St Francis Xavier College.