



# FCJ COLLEGE BENALLA

## Concerns and Complaint Policy

### 1. COMMITMENT TO CHILD SAFETY

All students enrolled, and any child visiting FCJ College, have a right to feel safe and be safe. The wellbeing of children in our care will always be our first priority and we have zero tolerance to child abuse. We aim to create a child safe and child friendly environment where children feel safe and are free to enjoy life to the full without any concern for their safety.

### 2. PREAMBLE

The Vision of FCJ College states:

**FCJ COLLEGE is a Catholic Educational Community of Companions *living in faith, nurturing with hope, serving with compassion and fostering the unique giftedness of each person, so that they are able to live.....For God Always.***

At FCJ College, we believe that:

- education is a partnership between the school, teachers, students and families, which involves a curriculum that offers students an authentic avenue to prepare themselves for the challenges of life ahead.
- we nurture, engage and encourage all students, in a safe, respectful and positive environment, to develop their gifts and become the best persons they can be.

### 3. RATIONALE

**We believe that the key principles of handling expressions of concern at FCJ College are underpinned by the following principals:**

- The College is open to the concerns of parents, caregivers and students.
- Complaints are received proactively and dealt with in an unbiased, constructive and respectful 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 handled expeditiously 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 are kept and a log is maintained.
- 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.

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



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The purpose of the FCJ College Concerns & Complaints Policy is to promote the wellbeing of students and staff, as well as meeting our obligations of addressing the legitimate concerns of parents, caregivers, students and staff.

This policy recognises that if there is a practice which is detrimental to the students' wellbeing 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 FCJ 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, Learning Leaders, Learning Coaches, Wellbeing staff, Support staff, Pastoral Leaders or subject teachers.

### 4. IMPLEMENTATION

#### 4.1 Sources of Complaints

Complaints may emanate from:

- parents (and caregivers)
- students
- staff
- the public

#### 4.2 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.

#### 4.3 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 will 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.



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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/concern.

### 4.4 Lines of Approach

The parent or caregiver would normally make initial contact to the Pastoral Leader, subject teacher, Learning Leader or other member of the school community. In instances of more serious concern, an appropriate member of the Executive team is to be informed of any parent or caregiver complaint. 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 will 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 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 they believe is most appropriate.

Responses to issues of serious concern will be communicated by the College Principal in verbal or written form only and may be complemented with email communication. Issues related to various instances of alleged professional misconduct are examples of circumstances that will be managed at this level.

### 4.5 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.



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#### 4.6 Recording

The College will keep an effective log of serious concerns. This is required because:

- it may become the cause of future legal action;
- patterns in the record may indicate a need for further 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 FCJ College will be consistent with the procedures outlined in the Catholic Education Office Sandhurst Complaints Policy (2016).

#### 4.7 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 due 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 the following points will apply:

- Complaints made by parents and caregivers should not rebound adversely on their children. Occasionally, it may be necessary to make third parties outside the College aware of the complaint and possibly identify those involved. This would only be likely to happen where, for example, a child's safety was at risk or it became necessary to refer the matter to the police. You would be fully informed and involved in such action.
- Confidentiality will apply at all stages of the process associated with the investigation and resolution of the complaint, and will apply to those individuals directly involved in the process.
- Complaints concerning staff will require that these individuals be informed of the nature of the complaint; such information will be made available to those representing the staff member(s) concerned.
- Anonymous complaints will not be acted upon officially or pursued.

#### 4.8 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:



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- 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 allows or the issue is serious, parents should receive a written report. This would cover:

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

#### 4.9 Difficult Complaints

Most complaints can be resolved if approached positively. If a complaint cannot be satisfactorily resolved by those involved, it is the responsibility of the Principal to come to a decision that is appropriate for the wellbeing of all parties concerned.

#### 4.10 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.

#### 4.12 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.



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### 4.13 A Leaflet for Parents and Students

A leaflet explaining the recommended avenues for expressing concerns at FCJ College are available at the College office. (Refer to Appendix A and B).

## 5. CONCLUSION

### 5.1 Aims and Objectives

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

### 5.2 Evaluation

The aims and objectives of this policy will be evaluated every three years by the Principal in liaison with College Council.

## 6. RELATED DOCUMENTS

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following documents:

- FCJ College Wellbeing Policy
- FCJ College Child Safe Policy
- FCJ College Code of Conduct for Parent/Guardian/Carer
- FCJ College Code of Conduct for Staff
- VIT Website
- Catholic Education Office: Code of Conduct
- Catholic Education Office: Complaints Policy

## 7. APPENDICES

**Appendix A:** Concerns and Complaints – A guide for parents and caregivers

**Appendix B:** Concerns and Complaints – A guide for students

**Appendix C:** Concerns and Complaints – A guide for staff

**Appendix D:** Parent/Guardian/Carer Code of Conduct



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### Appendix A

#### A GUIDE FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

FCJ College is committed to providing a safe and supportive environment where everyone is treated with respect, fairness and dignity. We aim to resolve concerns or complaints in a supportive, conciliatory environment.

At FCJ College, we acknowledge that parents and caregivers can, at times, feel concerned about their child's education or about something they believe is happening in their child's school.

We wish to ensure that:

- parents and caregivers may register their complaint with **respect** for all parties concerned,
- we listen and take complaints seriously,
- we respond to complaints within a reasonable time and in a courteous and efficient way, and
- we take appropriate action with the full knowledge of all parties concerned.

#### **"I am not sure whether to express my concern but there is something bothering me."**

If you have concerns, you are entitled to raise them and we would encourage you to do so as we are here to help.

#### **"What should I do first?"**

- Decide whether the problem is a query, a concern or a complaint. **Seek clarification.** This will help in finding a solution
- Try to identify the issue clearly. If there is more than one, list them to ensure that the extent of the problem is clear.
- Communicate your concerns calmly. Even if you don't feel it, being calm will help to get your concerns across more clearly than if you are upset or angry.

#### **"How should I register my concern?"**

##### ***By telephone***

Speak to the person most closely concerned with the issue, as he/she may be able to sort things out quickly. However, you may prefer to direct the matter to a more senior member of staff, for example the Pastoral Leader, Learning Leader or the Deputy Principal.

##### ***In writing***

As above. Please provide all details including your name, address, email, and contact details.

##### ***In person***

Contact the College to arrange a mutually convenient time to meet with the appropriate staff member.

#### **"What will happen next?"**

If you raise a concern in person or by telephone, it may be possible to resolve the matter immediately and to your satisfaction. If you have made a concern or complaint in writing we will respond to your concerns as soon as is possible.



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#### Appendix A continued.....

In many circumstances, the person you contact will need to discuss the matter further with other staff. You may be invited to a meeting with the appropriate staff member. A letter or report may be sent to you following such a meeting summarising the outcomes.

#### **“What happens about confidentiality?”**

Your complaint or concern will be treated in a confidential manner and with respect.

It is the College’s policy that complaints made by parents and caregivers should not rebound adversely on their children. Occasionally, it may be necessary to make third parties outside the College aware of the complaint and possibly identify those involved. This would only be likely to happen where, for example, a child’s safety was at risk or it became necessary to refer the matter to the police. You would be fully informed and involved in such action.

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.

While information relating to specific complaints will be kept confidentially on file, we would point out that anonymous complaints may not be pursued.

However, if a formal complaint is being made by a parent about a staff member, the staff member has the right to know the details of the complaint and the identity of the person making that complaint.

The Principal handles action taken under staff disciplinary procedures in a confidential manner within the College.

#### **“What if I am not satisfied with the outcome?”**

We hope that you will feel satisfied with the outcome, or at least that your concerns have been fully and fairly considered. However it is sometimes necessary for the Principal to administer an outcome for the wellbeing of all parties concerned.





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### Appendix B

#### A GUIDE FOR STUDENTS

##### How do I express a concern?

- By talking about it – or by writing\* it down if you find that easier. You can do it by yourself, or as part of a group, or through your parents/caregivers.

##### Who do I talk to?

- To anyone on staff.

##### Does it matter what the issue is?

- No, it can be a big problem or a small one. By discussing it, you may come up with positive ideas.

##### What will happen next?

- If possible, the staff member will deal with it in person. If not, they will go on your behalf to someone who can help.

##### Do others have to know?

- If you are worried about confidentiality, tell a staff member – he/she will understand.
- Occasionally, it may be necessary to make third parties outside the College aware of the complaint and possibly identify those involved. This would only be likely to happen where, for example, a child's safety was at risk or it became necessary to refer the matter to the police. You would be fully informed and involved in such action.

*Even if you find the issue hurtful or embarrassing, don't worry – it will only be discussed by staff who can help you.*

***\*Anonymous complaints will not be pursued.***



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### Appendix C

#### A GUIDE FOR STAFF

1. Listen objectively.
2. Acknowledge that the parents/caregivers have a concern.
3. Be familiar with College policy and refer to it as appropriate.
4. Define and separate the needs rather than the wants.
5. Document everything-particularly undertakings.
6. Be clear and realistic about agreements and outcomes.
7. Develop a strategic plan, outlining steps that have already been taken.
8. Consider all parties and their issues.
9. Maintain contact with the parents/caregivers
10. When suitable engage all involved parties to work together to solve the problem as a sound strategy for working through the concerns/ complaints. This is a powerful form of internal mediation.
11. Parents should accept the outcome if they are satisfied that a fair process has been followed.

Occasionally, it may be necessary to make third parties outside the College aware of the complaint and possibly identify those involved. This would only be likely to happen where, for example, a child's safety was at risk or it became necessary to refer the matter to the police. You would be fully informed and involved in such action.



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### Appendix D



## FCJ COLLEGE BENALLA Parent/Carers/Guardians – School CODE OF CONDUCT

### Introduction

At FCJ College Benalla we are committed to nurturing respectful relationships and active partnerships with you as **parents/carers/guardians**. We believe that our students' learning journeys are enriched through positive and reciprocal home and school relationships.

As **parents/carers/guardians**, you act as one of the most influential role models in your child's life. We therefore seek your support in promoting and upholding the core values of the school community and its culture of respectful relationships within a Catholic faith tradition

This Code of Conduct will guide your interactions and communications with staff, other **parents/carers/guardians**, students and the wider school community. It articulates the school's key expectations of both staff and **parents/carers/guardians** with regard to respectful relationships and behaviours. It also specifies the school's position with regard to unacceptable behaviours that breach our culture of respect.

This Code of Conduct is to be read in conjunction with the school's:

- Occupational Health and Safety Policy
- Complaints Policy and procedure
- Child Safe Policy

### Our Culture of Respectful Relationships

Among students, staff and **parents/carers/guardians** we strive to develop the following:

- A respect for the innate dignity and worth of every person;
- An ability to understand the situation of others;
- A cooperative attitude in working with others;
- Open, positive and honest communication;
- The ability to work respectfully with other people;
- Trusting relationships; and
- Responsible actions

In Promoting & Upholding this Culture, we expect that STAFF will:	In Promoting & Upholding this Culture, we expect that PARENTS will:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicate with you regularly regarding your child's learning, development and wellbeing;</li> <li>• Provide opportunities for involvement in your child's learning;</li> <li>• Maintain confidentiality over sensitive issues;</li> <li>• Relate with and respond to you in a respectful and professional manner; and</li> <li>• Ensure a timely response to any concerns raised by you.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support the school's Catholic ethos, traditions and practices;</li> <li>• Treat staff, students and other parents/carers/guardians with respect and courtesy;</li> <li>• Support the school in its efforts to maintain a positive teaching and learning environment;</li> <li>• Understand the importance of healthy parent/teacher/child relationships and strive to build the relationships;</li> <li>• Adhere to the school's policies, as outlined on the school website.</li> </ul>



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### Appendix D continued.....

#### Raising Concerns & Resolving Conflict

*(Refer also to our Complaints Policy)*

In raising concerns on behalf of your child, or making a complaint about the school's practices or treatment of your child, we expect that you will:

- Listen to your child, but remember that a different 'reality' may exist elsewhere;
- Observe the school's stated procedures for raising and resolving a grievance/complaint;
- Follow specified protocol for communication with staff members, including making appointments at a mutually convenient time and communicating your concerns in a constructive manner; and
- Refrain from approaching another child while in the care of the school to discuss or chastise them because of actions towards your child. Refer the matter directly to your child's teacher for follow-up and investigation by the school.

In responding to your concerns or a complaint, we expect that staff will:

- Observe confidentiality and a respect for sensitive issues;
- Ensure your views and opinions are heard and understood;
- Communicate and respond in ways that are constructive, fair and respectful;
- Ensure a timely response to your concerns/complaint; and
- Strive for resolutions and outcomes that are satisfactory to all parties.

#### Safety & Wellbeing

The school places high value and priority on maintaining a safe and respectful working environment. We regard certain behaviours as harmful and unacceptable if they compromise the safety and wellbeing of a member of our school community. These behaviours include, but are not limited to:

- Shouting or swearing, either in person or by other means
- Physical or verbal intimidation and or threats
- Aggressive hand gestures;
- Writing rude, defamatory, aggressive or abusive comments to/about a member of the school community (emails/social media);
- Racist, sexist or other denigrating comments or images
- Acts of violence; or
- Damage or violation of possessions/property.

When an adult behaves in such unacceptable ways, the Principal or Principal's nominee will seek to resolve the situation in one or more of the following ways:

1. repair relationships through discussion and/or mediation.
2. exercise our legal right to impose a temporary restriction or permanent ban from the school premises
3. report the incident to the police.

This Code of Conduct is endorsed by Catholic Education Sandhurst.

**Date of Implementation – September 2018**

**Date for Review – September 2020**