



Sources of Authority	
CECWA Policy	Community
Executive Directive	Dispute and Complaint Resolution

## DISPUTE AND COMPLAINT RESOLUTION PROCEDURES

### RATIONALE

Catholic schools can serve as models for all within Western Australia who seek to create genuine communities. Such communities are always founded upon shared commitment to the common good (Mandate, para 6).

On occasions there may be disagreement with a decision and a dispute or complaint may arise within a Catholic school.

The interactions and protocols of Catholic schools emphasise the sacredness of human life and the dignity of the individual.

St Luke's Catholic Primary is committed to ensuring that disputes and complaints are dealt with fairly, objectively and in a timely manner, and that processes reflect the principles of participation, co-responsibility and subsidiarity.

### DEFINITIONS

Complaint means an expression of dissatisfaction with St Luke's Catholic Primary policies, procedures, decisions, omissions, quality of service, staff or student behaviour.

Dispute means a conflict regarding a right, claim, or demand on one side, met by contrary claims or allegations on the other.

Procedural Fairness refers to the procedures used by a decision-maker, rather than the actual outcome reached. It requires a fair and proper procedure be used when making a decision.

Resolution means that a matter has been resolved to the satisfaction of St Luke's Catholic Primary and/or Catholic Education in Western Australia with respect to the paramount importance of the student(s).

Students are defined as children and young people enrolled in schools and early learning and care services.

## PRINCIPLES

- All decisions are to reflect the paramount importance of the student(s).
- Any person may complain orally or in writing about any matter arising from the operations of St Luke's Catholic Primary.
- Complainants are personally responsible and liable for the content of their complaints.
- A dispute or complaint made in accordance with this policy is a dispute or complaint about St Luke's Catholic Primary, notwithstanding the naming of any staff member in a dispute or complaint.
- It is preferable that the complainant is verifiable, however if a complaint or any other information of unknown origin (i.e. anonymous) provides information that would cause the Principal concern, it should be considered by the Principal so that they can determine the appropriate course of action.
- Disputes and complaints will be managed in accordance with the Principle of Subsidiarity, which requires that nothing should be done by a higher authority, agency or level that could be done as well or better by a lower one.
- Disputes and complaints, and the resolution of such, contribute to continuous learning and improvement so that the potential and opportunity for incidents to be repeated are minimised.
- Any review of a dispute or complaint will be based on procedural fairness.
- Information in a complaint should only be disclosed to those parties who have a need to know in order to investigate and resolve the complaint.
- Once a decision has been made, parties may request a review of the decision in accordance with the Procedures, including escalating the dispute or complaint to the Executive Director of Catholic Education in Western Australia.

## PROCEDURES

1. Information about the process for dealing with disputes and complaints is readily available to parents, students and staff via the school website and the Parent Handbook.
2. A dispute or complaint can be made by any person regarding the provision of education or related matter. Depending on the nature and level of the complaint, it should be made in writing.
3. Where an immediate party cannot be identified, such as if it is anonymous or from an unverifiable source, the information should be assessed and duly considered.
4. Where there is an appropriate school policy statement that provides a specific mechanism for addressing the dispute or complaint, that policy statement shall be followed.
5. Where there is a binding legislative or regulatory mechanism (including an Enterprise Bargaining Agreement) that addresses the issue raised in the dispute or complaint, that legislative or regulatory mechanism shall be followed.
6. When a dispute or complaint arises, the immediate parties involved should attempt to resolve the issue in the first instance.
7. Parties may involve a support person(s) to assist them in resolving the dispute or complaint.
8. Should a complainant be dissatisfied with the resolution as a result of involvement of the immediate parties, or if there are unique circumstances, the matter can be referred to the next level by the complainant, for example, to the Principal.
9. The Principal is responsible for the resolution of disputes or complaints within the school referred to them by the immediate parties, in accordance with procedural fairness.

10. Where a dispute or complaint is about the Principal and there is no likelihood that it can be resolved directly with the Principal, the immediate parties may refer the dispute or complaint to the Executive Director of Catholic Education.
11. The Principal will be mindful of managing the wider effects that a dispute or complaint may have on the workplace beyond its resolution.
12. The Principal may request external assistance and expertise (including mediation), including the involvement of the Employment and Community Relations Team of the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia (CEOWA) to assist in the resolution of a dispute or complaint.
13. The Principal shall inform the complainant (unless anonymous) and relevant parties of the outcome of their decision.
14. The Principal shall maintain appropriate records of the relevant particulars used to make a decision in response to any formal dispute or complaint. Where applicable this will include any statements made by the parties involved.
15. Any party may request a review of the Principal's decision, in writing, to the Executive Director of Catholic Education.
16. The dispute or complaint shall be promptly acknowledged within 3 business days. If the complaint is informal, this acknowledgment may be verbal. For formal complaints, or complaints that have escalated, the matter will be acknowledged in writing, unless the complainant is anonymous and cannot be identified. St Luke's aims to achieve an outcome within 10 business days, depending on the nature of the complaint.
17. The Executive Director of Catholic Education shall ensure a formal examination and investigation of the complaint and/or areas of disputation.
18. The parties to the dispute or complaint shall be notified of the findings(s) of the dispute or complaint, including the basis of the finding(s). There is no duty to notify an anonymous complainant.
19. The CEOWA shall maintain appropriate records of the relevant particulars used to make a decision in response to any formal dispute or complaint. Where applicable these will include any statements made by the parties involved.
20. An individual has the right to make an appeal to the Minister for Education with regard to a dispute or complaint (School Education Act 1999). An appeal will only be heard on a breach in process and will not be a re-examination of the merits of the case.
21. A person may make a complaint to an external body or tribunal at any time. The relevant person (i.e. the Principal) may choose to suspend addressing the complaint until the external body or tribunal rules on the complaint, or the external complaint is directed back to Catholic Education for resolution.

## **COMMUNICATION METHODS AND TIMELINES IN RESOLVING COMPLAINTS**

St Luke's recognises that early resolution of disputes and complaints provides a better experience for our school community, and more efficient complaint handling. Our procedures empower our staff to:

- action and finalise complaints in the first instance, where possible; and
- triage complaints so that simple matters can be resolved quickly.

We aim for end-to-end complaint handling by a single staff member but offer flexibility to escalate or assign complaints to be resolved elsewhere when needed so that complaints are managed by staff with the appropriate skill level and function, and complaint resolution is not delayed by staff absences. Our tiered system of addressing complaints and approximate timeframes for their resolution is as follows:

Simple complaints	Intermediate complaints	Complex or sensitive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- resolved within three (3) business days</li> <li>- often resolved by staff member in the first instance during initial contact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- resolved within seven (7) business days</li> <li>- may be referred to a member of the school leadership team if appropriate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- resolved within 28 days of initial receipt</li> <li>- require formal investigation and may require support from external agencies, including CEWA</li> </ul>

**Please note:** these timelines are for complaints that are made/resolved at the school level. St Luke's cannot guarantee the timeframe for a matter to be resolved if it is appealed to or reviewed by an external agency or third party.

## REFERENCES

Bishops of Western Australia 2009, Mandate of the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia: 2009-2015  
 School Education Act 1999 (WA)

## RELATED DOCUMENTS

CECWA policy statements:

2-B1 Selection and Use of Texts in Catholic Schools

2-B7 Justice Education

2-C4 Harassment, Unlawful Discrimination, Victimization and Bullying

2-C8 Unsatisfactory Performance or Misconduct

2-D3 Child Protection

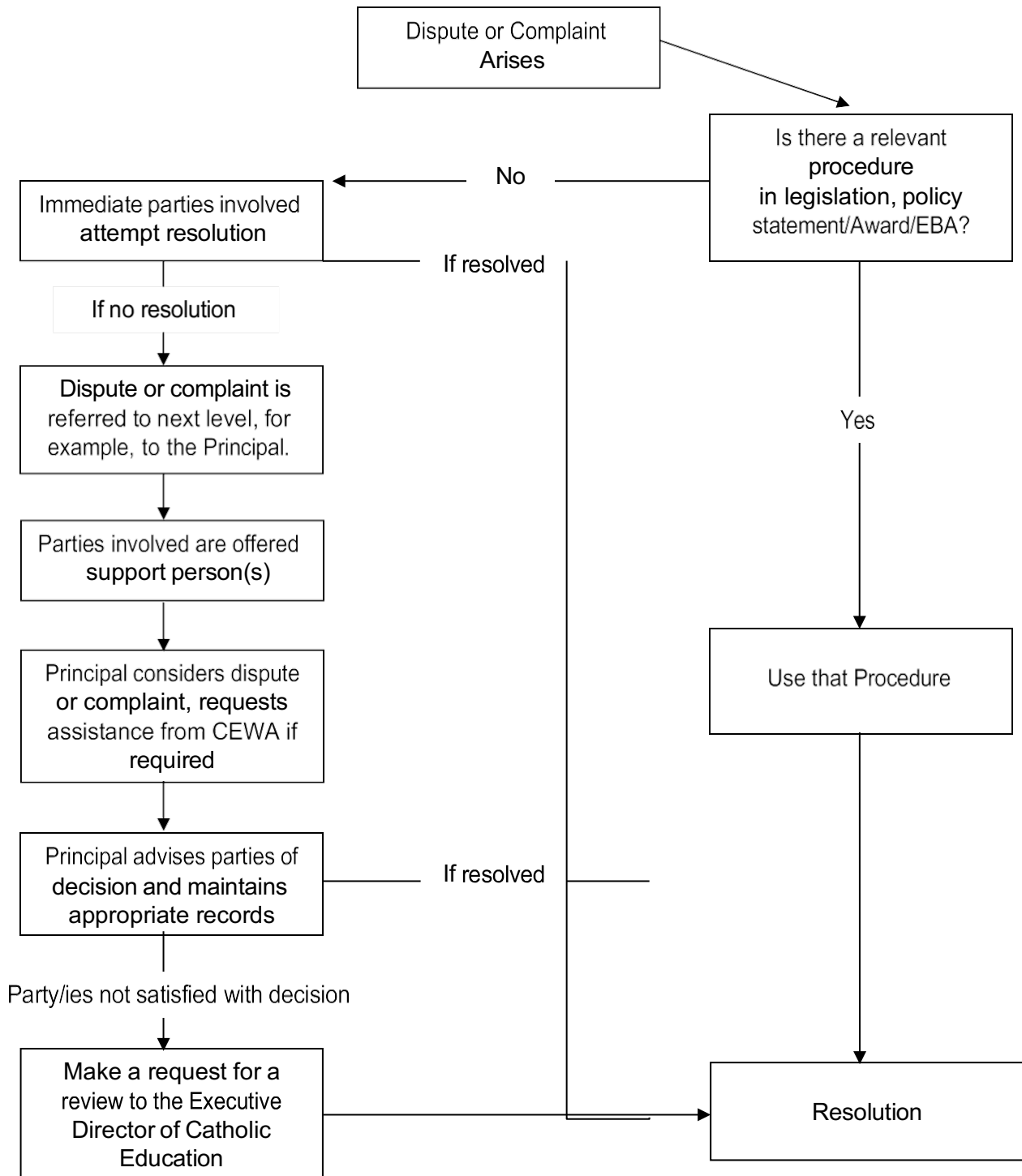
2-D5 Student Enrolment

2-D6 Dealing with Bullying, Harassment, Aggression and Violence (Students)

2-D7 Exclusion of Students for Disciplinary Reasons

Code of Ethical Conduct

## Flowchart for Dealing with Disputes and Complaints



Note: The Director General of the Department of Education is responsible for ensuring that the school observes the registration standards, including the standard about its complaints handling system. Any student, parent or community member is entitled to contact the Director General with concerns about how the school has dealt with a complaint. Information is available on the Department of Education website. While the Director General may consider whether the school has breached the registration standards, she does not have the power to intervene in a complaint or override the school's decision.

Next Review: 2025