

## A Message from the Director of Schools

### Building a Safe and Supportive Culture in our Catholic Schools How does a Complaints Procedure fit in?

Catholic schools in the Diocese of Wollongong are committed to a safe and supportive environment. This is characterised by fairness, mutual trust, respect and reconciliation. Those in leadership positions have a key role in promoting an environment and building a community based on these values. The principles, guidelines and procedures set out in the Policy documents *Maintaining Right Relationships* and *Safe Work Environment* are the framework for school leaders, students, staff, parents and the wider community to develop a safe and supportive environment.

A safe and supportive environment is developed when all members of a school community promote open communication, tolerance and positive relationships and embrace responsive, just and transparent processes. When clear preventative policies are applied consistently and issues that can give rise to complaints are identified early, matters can be resolved before they escalate to the point where relationships are damaged. To promote positive and effective relationships all staff are encouraged to recognise the distinction between personal and professional conflict so that appropriate relationships can be maintained, even where there might be professional disagreement.

Complaints and suggestions can be opportunities for growth and improvement. A community that is open to complaints and suggestions is characterised by signs of impartiality and confidentiality, respect for the dignity of those involved, and is proactive in ensuring there is no fear of victimisation. The processes in the *Complaints Handling Procedure* are to ensure procedural fairness, with a fair hearing and a reasonable decision.

The *Complaints Handling Procedure* helps build a safe and supportive culture as it ...

- Encourages early intervention in issues before they damage working relationships
- Ensures that behaviours destructive to positive relationships (such as bullying, harassment and discrimination) are identified as being unacceptable and are appropriately managed
- Ensures that complaints are dealt with consistently
- Enables a school community to identify patterns of unacceptable conduct and enables prevention strategies to be developed and implemented
- Encourages individuals, with support, to resolve issues directly without third party intervention, and reduces the likelihood that external agencies will need to be involved

The *Complaints Handling Procedure* forms an important element in the Diocese's commitment to ensuring safe and supportive environments for our school communities. Leadership teams are responsible for ensuring that it is explained, that the processes for raising matters of concern are well understood, and that the processes for responding to matters of concern are implemented.

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