



FEEDBACK, CONCERN & COMPLAINTS

POLICY & PROCESSES

Rationale:

This document deals mainly with procedures for parents, students or the general public. The Education Act 1999 has, as a condition of registration and re-registration, a requirement that a school has a dispute resolution procedure. While parents will often wish to raise issues on behalf of their children, there are other issues which students may choose to raise on their own behalf and which are best raised by them. Concerns or complaints from members of the public will be treated in a similar way to those from parents, although most feedback from the public would be referred directly to the Principal or a senior member of staff.

Definition:

Feedback: Can be offered in various forms, by way of making positive or critical observation or offering suggestions through both informal and formal means. Feedback may encompass, for example:

- Seeking clarification
- Suggesting ways to make improvement
- Highlighting positive observations or pointing to matters requiring improvement

Concern: An expression of doubt concerning the appropriateness or validity of how someone at the College has behaved, and generally seeks to inform, gain clarity or elicit improvement. A concern may be raised if a parent feels that someone at the College has, for example:

- possibly acted or behaved inappropriately or impolitely
- acted unusually or potentially contrary to the College's purpose and mission

Complaint: An expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem that requires some form of resolution. A complaint may be made if a parent thinks that the College has, for example:

- done something wrong
- failed to do something it should have done; or
- acted unfairly or negligently.

A complaint may be made about the College as a whole, a specific department in the school, an individual member of staff, or another member of the Iona community.

All complaints need to be handled seriously.

Complaints about child abuse, grooming or other harm, or other breaches of our Child Safe Codes of Conduct, relating to conduct by:

- current or former staff members
- current or former students
- other people on College premises or at College events

are managed differently from other complaints. Please see below (Complaints about Child Safety).

Principles:

Iona Presentation College is committed to handling complaints effectively and efficiently. To manage complaints effectively, we have established a Complaints Handling Program in line with:

- Principle 6 of the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations, using the Office of Child Safety's Complaints Handling Guide: Upholding the Rights of Children and Young People"
- The international complaints handling standard (ISO 10002:2018 Quality management – Customer satisfaction – Guidelines for complaints handling in organizations), and
- The Australian/New Zealand complaints handling standard (AS/NZS 10002:2014 Guidelines for complaint management in organisations).

In general, the College further abides by the practice of:

- the school is open to the concerns of parents and students;
- complaints are received in a positive manner;
- parents and students can expect to be taken seriously and can approach any member of staff about their concerns;
- concerns are dealt with as speedily as possible 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 have raised a concern or a complaint;
- confidentiality is respected and maintained so far as is possible;
- clear confidential files and a record are kept;
- resolution of the matter is sought;
- communication from the school is clear and unambiguous;
- staff are trained in the handling of complaints.

Procedure:

Problems are likely to arise if parents feel that the school is not open to their concerns. It is better to have a direct complaint to a member of staff than to have parents sharing their dissatisfaction with others. Parents like to feel valued and involved with the school and they are encouraged to voice their concerns.

An effective complaints procedure can diffuse problems and can provide the school with helpful information. Complaints treated as constructive suggestions can be used to improve standards and may prevent cause for further complaint. Even an unjustified complaint may indicate an area that can be improved.

Lines of Approach

Iona has a clear protocol for dealing with a complaint. All members of staff are encouraged to deal with parental feedback or concerns that lie within their area of responsibility and parents are encouraged to direct their initial concerns to the staff member involved. If approached about a matter that lies outside their area, staff should refer it to a member of the College Leadership Team.

All members of the community are able to lodge a complaint online via the 'Feedback' option of the College website: <https://www.iona.wa.edu.au/view/the-essentials/feedback>

Iona Presentation College's complaints handling process conforms to the rules of procedural fairness and confidentiality – information is only shared with those who need to know.

Steps in raising a concern or making a complaint:

1. Speak or write to the person involved (e.g. classroom teacher, home room teacher, coach)

If not resolved, then

2. Speak or write to the relevant department leader (e.g. Head of Year, Head of Learning Area, Director of Sport, Boarding Coordinator)

If not resolved, then

3. Speak or write to a member of the College Leadership Team (e.g. Deputy Students, Deputy Studies, Business Manager)

If not resolved, then

4. Speak or write to the Principal

Matters incapable of resolution at a particular level are referred to the appropriate senior person, with parents kept informed of the action being taken. The College Leadership Team recognises when issues need to go straight to the Principal, with whom the responsibility for complaint lies.

If parents wish to go straight to the Principal with their concerns or complaint, this should be respected. However, it should be explained that the Principal might not be able to respond until she has consulted appropriate staff. Parents may also be encouraged to approach the appropriate staff member, Head of Department, Team Leader or Senior Staff member in the first instance.

Written responses to concerns or complaints should always be discussed with and approved by the Principal. Serious complaints are shared with the Chair of the College Board by the Principal. There may be certain circumstances, such as complaints about the Principal, when the parents need to direct their complaint in writing to the Chairman. This should be marked "Confidential" and addressed to: The Chair of the College Board, Iona Presentation College, 33 Palmerston Street, Mosman Park, WA 6012.

Should there be any concerns or complaint about a Board member, this must be addressed in writing and directed to the Chair of the College Board, marked "Confidential" and posted as above to the school address. Complaints about the Chair may be addressed to Executive Director, Catholic Education WA, 50 Ruislip Street, Leederville WA 6007.

The Role of the Director General

The Director General of the Department of Education is responsible for ensuring that the College 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 College has dealt with a complaint. Information is available on the Department of Education website. While the Director General may consider whether the College has breached the Registration Standards, she does not have the power to intervene in a complaint or override the College's decision.

Complaints About Child Safety Incidents or Concerns at or Involving the College or its Staff Members

Complaints about or allegations of:

- breaches of the Child Safe Codes of Conduct
 - child abuse, grooming or other harm of a current or former student by a current or former staff member
 - current or former students
 - other people on College premises or at College events
- are managed by the College in a different manner from other complaints

This is because of the additional confidentiality and privacy requirements surrounding these kinds of matters. We refer to these as child safety related complaints.

If your complaint is a child safety related complaint, please make your complaint to the Deputy Principal, Kelly Smith, on 08 9384 0066 or at kelly.smith@iona.wa.edu.au, or, if this person is the subject of your complaint, please notify the College Principal, Anne Pitso on 08 9384 0066 or at anne.pitso@iona.wa.edu.au

Recording:

The College keeps an effective record of Complaints Register and other significant parental concerns 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 record if necessary.

The record should contain the following information:

- date the issue was raised;
- name of person or parent (or guardian);
- name of student (if applicable);
- brief statement of issue;
- member of staff handling the issue; and
- brief statement of outcome, including closure date and date of last correspondence.

Confidentiality:

Confidentiality is an important issue for students, parents and staff. It is essential that any complaint is treated in a confidential manner and with respect. Parents often seek an assurance of confidentiality before expressing their concerns. If, for example, they wish to discuss a particular member of staff, they may fear that their child will suffer in some way because they have complained.

The College's policy requires that complaints made by parents must not rebound adversely on their children and similarly that complaints raised by students must not rebound on them or on other students.

The question of confidentiality should be discussed sensitively and on an individual basis with the parents and the College's policy should be carefully explained. If there is a situation involving the authorities (e.g. police), the Principal or next most senior staff member (if the Principal is unavailable), will take responsibility for action in the school and the Chair of the College Board will be informed as soon as possible. If this is a Critical Incident, the Principal will also advise the WA Department of Education Services (DES).

Anonymous Complaints

Anonymous complaints may be where there is no indication of either name or address, or where the complainant says that they do not wish to be identified.

Anonymous complaints may come from members of the public, from parents or from students. Complaints from the public about the behaviour of a group of students will be dealt with on a general basis, with reminders to the relevant student group(s) about the College's expectations.

Parents and students are encouraged to give their names and are given reassurance on the issue of confidentiality. If they persist in wishing to remain anonymous, it is at the Principal's discretion as to what action, if any, will be taken, depending on the nature of the complaint.

Resolution

Sometimes the very acknowledgement of feedback, an issue or concern by the school brings relief and resolution for parents. Satisfaction for a complainant may come from any of the following:

- knowing that changes have been made, and that matters will be different in future;
- knowing that the school is now alerted to a possible problem;
- feeling that their concern has been considered seriously;
- an outcome which may be different from the one they sought, but which they perceive to be well-considered;
- a considered letter;
- an apology.

Intractable Complaints:

There may be a small minority of persistent or aggressive complainants who will never be satisfied, whatever the school does. The school may even discover on investigation that the complaint was without foundation or motivated by malice. Nevertheless, Iona treats all complaints seriously and follows the College's policy and procedures. Most complaints can be resolved if approached positively. If a complaint becomes intractable, it may be due to its nature or to the way in which it was handled, or possibly because the parent perceives the school to have 'closed ranks' against him or her.

A complaint is considered to be intractable if the parents have appealed to the Principal and are still not satisfied with the response. Intractable complaints may be dealt with as follows:

Referral to the Chair of the College Board

The Principal will refer the matter to the Chair of the College Board and inform the parents that this stage has been reached. However, a situation may arise where the complaint seems to the parent, to have been mishandled by the Principal. In those circumstances, the parent should write directly to the Chair.

The Chair will discuss the matter fully with the Principal and be provided with relevant documentation. If a briefing is required from a member of staff, this should occur in the presence of the Principal.

The Chair will respond to the parents, notifying them that they are reviewing the matter, asking them if they wish to add anything further and providing a date by which they may expect a response.

The Chair may be able to offer a new approach to the matter, and this may satisfy the parents. The Chair's response should be clear and offer a meeting if the parents remain troubled.

Meeting with the Chair of the College Board

If a meeting is requested, the Chair will offer to meet the parents at a time convenient to them. Parents are permitted to bring with them a supportive friend who is not involved with the complaint.

The Chair, will listen to and question the parents and the Principal, in the hope that a solution can be found. On rare occasions, this may not be possible.

Induction:

As part of their induction, new staff will be made aware of this Feedback and Complaints Policy and its implementation.

The principles that apply to parental complaints should also be applied to complaints and concerns from students. There are, however, differences in approaches. One important difference from the handling of parental concerns or complaint is that students should be able to raise concerns with any member of staff with whom they feel comfortable, whether it is the class or home room teacher, a counsellor, a member of the senior staff, or the Principal.

In more complex situations, once the matter is resolved, the outcome will be discussed with the student by a member of staff. To make sure that it is fully understood, a written record may be shared.

Concerns or complaints that appear trivial still need to be handled seriously. Young people may test the complaints procedures on relatively minor issues before finding the confidence to raise something painful, such as bullying. If the issue is a painful one, or if exploration of it is taking time, a student may need support from another student or from an adult. Students are encouraged to choose a person with whom they feel comfortable to provide support.

Complaints, and ways of dealing with them, also need to be explained to students. This is covered in the Student Planner, formally and informally.