



Timaru Christian School Procedures

PS5 - Complaints

Most complaints can be resolved informally by discussions with the people concerned. If an informal approach is not successful the complaint should be brought to the attention of a senior staff member or the principal.

If the complaint is made to a board member, the complainant is encouraged to resolve the issue informally by raising the matter with the teacher concerned, and the board member must inform the principal.

Generally, an anonymous complaint cannot be processed unless there is a sound legal reason for protecting the identity of the complainant.

This procedure enables us to:

- deal with complaints fairly, effectively, and promptly
- maintain confidentiality
- preserve school/community relationships and communication.

Guidelines for Parents with a Complaint

If you have a complaint about a staff member, contact the person involved and discuss the matter. We ask that parents approach the staff member concerned directly, and as soon as possible, to prevent issues escalating or remaining unresolved.

If you have a complaint about a student, contact your child's teacher with your concerns. They will follow it up, seeking information from students and other staff members as appropriate, and report back to you as to the outcomes in a timely manner.

If the matter doesn't involve a particular staff member, or you do not wish to contact the staff member concerned, or you are unhappy with the outcome of meeting with the staff member, contact a senior staff member or the principal to discuss further resolution.

If the matter concerns the principal and you have not resolved it by discussion with the principal, and feel uncomfortable directly approaching the principal, contact the chairperson of the board of trustees.

If an informal meeting does not resolve your concern, you can make a formal complaint.



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Formal Complaint

In the interests of fairness, any formal complaint or serious allegation must be made in writing and resolved in a timely fashion. All parties should respect confidentiality.

Follow this process:

| Responsibility: | Action |
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| Complainant | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Put your concerns in writing, and sign the letter. Give as many details as possible, including details of efforts that have been made to resolve the issue. Include names and contact phone numbers.2. Send the letter marked Confidential to the school principal or, if the complaint is about the principal, to the chairperson of the board of trustees. The contact details are available from the school office. |
| Principal (if complaint is about a staff member) | <ol style="list-style-type: none">3. Acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing or by email to the complainant. Give a copy of the complaint to the staff member concerned. Inform the chairperson of the board of trustees. |
| Board chair (if complaint is about the principal) | <ol style="list-style-type: none">4. Acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing or by email to the complainant. Give a copy of the complaint to the principal. |

If the interim response does not resolve matters, or the matter is deemed sufficiently serious, an investigation is carried out.



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Investigate a Formal Complaint or Serious Allegation

When a formal complaint is received, the school may choose to investigate it if it is deemed serious enough to warrant it. Not all complaints require an investigation but all written complaints should be disclosed to the staff concerned at the earliest opportunity. Relevant collective employment agreement provisions for dealing with complaints and discipline must be observed including allowing representation of staff at any meeting to discuss a written complaint.

The School Trustees Association or legal counsel should be contacted for advice before proceeding to investigate.

Note: if the complaint is against the principal, the principal should not take part in the investigation.

The following guidelines assist in conducting an investigation.

Responsibility:

Principal and chairperson of the board of trustees

Action

1. Determine the scope of the investigation, and involvement of the board in an investigating committee.
Determine whether an independent investigator should be appointed to make preliminary findings for the board's consideration (note that the board cannot delegate decision-making responsibility to non-board members).
Appoint an investigating committee if the complaint or the potential outcome of the investigation warrants it and delegate the committee responsibility to make decisions (by a board resolution).
Consider carefully if any investigator has a potential conflict of interest or potential for bias.
2. Inform the school's insurance company of the complaint and steps taken to resolve it. This is a strict insurance policy requirement to maintain cover.
3. Inform the staff member involved that an investigation is planned, and the scope of the investigation.
4. Advise the staff member in writing to seek union or legal advice and representation.



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| Staff member concerned | 5. Make a written response to the complaint. |
| Principal/investigating committee | 6. Complete and take notes on relevant inquiries and interviews. Note that taping such meetings is permitted. |
| | 7. Make detailed reports of all discussions, interviews, questions and answers. |
| | 8. Consider the staff member's written response, and determine the outcome of the investigation on the balance of probability. |
| | 9. Inform the staff member in writing of a preliminary outcome and invite the staff member and any support people to a board meeting. |
| | This meeting must be a formally constituted meeting which must be set up in writing with the staff member being afforded an opportunity to be represented. (Do seek STA or legal advice in preparing this letter.) |

At the Board Meeting

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| Investigating committee | 10. Brief the board in committee on the scope and outcome of the investigation and preliminary findings. Invite the staff member to respond to the findings at the board meeting. |
| Staff member and representatives | 11. Withdraw from the meeting. |
| Board of trustees | 12. Determine any action and inform the staff member of the preliminary decision and any proposed penalty. |
| Staff member and representatives | 13. Make a final submission on the preliminary decision and proposed penalty. |
| Board of trustees | 14. Adjourn to consider the submission and then reconvene to confirm an outcome. If it is a disciplinary sanction (including dismissal) confirm it in writing after legal advice and prior consultation with the insurance company. You may adjourn to seek further advice or to further investigate any matter raised during the meeting. |
| | 15. Report back to the complainant(s), reassuring them as far as possible of the steps undertaken by the board to resolve their concern, and facilitate any further steps which may be required to provide satisfactory closure. |