Conflict Resolution Policy

The purpose of this policy is to set out for all involved within the Christian Schools Tasmania community, the way to deal with any concerns, disagreements and conflicts that may arise.

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1. Related Documents
   - Christian Schools Tasmania Vision, Mission & Values
   - Christian Schools Tasmania Code of Christian Conduct
   - Christian Schools Tasmania Grievance Response Policy

2. Scope
   This code applies to all employees of Christian Schools Tasmania (CST), whether employed on a permanent, temporary or casual basis.

3. Definition of Terms
   Where referred to in this document:

   Christian Schools Tasmania means an association of Christians who through their Board of Directors are legally responsible for Calvin Christian School, Channel Christian School, Emmanuel Christian School and Northern Christian School.

   The Board means the Board of Directors of Christian Schools Tasmania.

   Executive is a forum including the Executive Director, Principals and the Business Manager.

   Executive Director is the person appointed to the position of Executive Director of the Association, or a person acting from time to time in that position.

   Principal means the person charged with responsibility for the operation of an Association school or a person acting from time to time in that position.

   Business Manager is the person appointed to the position of Business Manager of the Association, or a person acting from time to time in that position.
4. Summary

There are times in every community when people may have concerns about how an issue is being addressed. Upon being raised, these concerns may be found to be misunderstandings and be easily resolved, or they may become a point of disagreement between the people involved. Where a disagreement is not comfortably resolved, it may become a point of conflict, and assistance from another person may be required in order to seek suitable resolution.

The manner in which concerns, disagreements and conflicts are managed can mean the difference between harmony and tension in a community. This policy sets out for parents, students, employees and others involved within the Christian Schools Tasmania community, the way to deal with any concerns, disagreements and conflicts that may arise, and to promote their resolution by measures based on consultation and co-operation consistent with biblical principles and practices.

5. Guiding Principles

5.1 As a Christian community, mindful that we bear witness for God in this world, we strive to maintain an environment of unity in Christ, and we acknowledge that in the Scriptures we each are urged to …live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called— one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:1-6)

As a community we therefore strive to maintain unity and peace through open communication and respect for one another.

5.2 We recognise that unity does not mean conformity. As such, we embrace the opportunity that productive disagreement can provide and welcome and value diversity of opinion. While able to cause tensions, differences need not be threatening. They can be God’s way of enriching our community.

5.3 Conflict generally will involve both disagreements over a substantive issue and the fracturing of a relationship. We recognise that real resolution involves the preservation or restoration of the relationship as well as working through the substantive issues of the disagreement. We commit to working to achieve true and complete reconciliation in resolving concerns, disagreements and conflicts within the community.

5.4 We recognise that while not all members of the Christian Schools Tasmania community share the same Christian belief, the principles that guide our thinking and actions in relation to this have strength and value for all. In Christ we maintain a commitment to each other, especially in times of failure and disharmony. We recognise not only that staff, parents and students have shortcomings, but also that sin requires repentance and correction.
6. Process

Other Policies and Procedures

6.1 Where an issue involves child protection or another area covered by specific legislation it will be referred immediately to the relevant external agency. This may preclude application of this Policy for a time.

6.2 Where matters of a grievance are concerned, Christian Schools Tasmania has a complementary but distinct process to deal with these. This process is detailed in the Grievance Response Policy.

6.3 In all cases, policies and procedures of Christian Schools Tasmania and the individual school addressing the particular issue shall be followed. This policy is designed to complement, not override, the proper process in relation to such matters.

Process for managing a Disagreement or Conflict

6.4 Within Christian Schools Tasmania there is a commitment to the ongoing development of a culture of peace. This includes commitment to the promotion of understanding across the community of these biblical principles as explained through Peacewise (www.peacewise.org.au).

6.5 The Bible provides us with great wisdom for dealing with disagreement. It commands and challenges us to bring honour and glory to God through all our interactions, during times of peace or conflict with one another. When people are in disagreement within our community we strongly encourage them to be guided in their one-to-one interaction by the peace-making principles, found throughout the Bible and particularly in Matthew 5 & 18, in order to resolve the substantive and relational issues at the heart of the disagreement.

6.6 Any person involved in the Christian Schools Tasmania community has the right to raise a concern and have it responded to promptly, fairly and without fear of repercussion. Information regarding the process for making enquiries, or raising concerns will be made available to all members of the Christian Schools Tasmania community.

6.7 Members of the Christian Schools Tasmania community have a responsibility to raise their concerns at the earliest possible time. Generally, the greatest success in resolving issues is where they are addressed as soon as they arise.

6.8 If a disagreement arises between a staff member, parent/ guardian, student or a community member, the people involved must first meet together to clearly and respectfully discuss the issues involved and attempt to resolve the matter.

6.9 Where an issue is raised, everyone involved is expected to treat one another as they would wish to be treated, and speak to one another with respect and expectation of understanding and resolution.

6.10 Issues may able to be resolved at this one-to-one level, with forgiveness and restoration being the optimal conclusion.
6.11 Where resolution is not achieved at this one-to-one level, the Bible provides a clear process for continuing to bring glory to God through our interactions, even in times of disagreement. Under the Matthew 18 biblical principal, where the people involved in a disagreement fail to reach a resolution in a timely manner, they should request a person with pastoral responsibility for them to assist them to come to a resolution and restoration of their relationship.

6.12 Within the context of Christian Schools Tasmania, this will generally mean referring the matter to a relevant Senior Staff member, Principal or Manager to facilitate further discussion between the parties involved.

6.13 Every person involved in a disagreement has both the right to confidentiality, and the responsibility to maintain confidentiality. Where it is deemed appropriate to inform other people of the disagreement, every person involved will be informed of this and the reasons for involving another person.

6.14 While this can be an ongoing, lengthy and potentially frustrating process at times, it is the best possible way to bring about actual resolution of both the relational and substantive issues between the people involved. Therefore, where those involved remain willing to participate in this process, Christian Schools Tasmania will support their efforts in whatever manner may be appropriate and required. This may include bringing in outside resources to assist the people involved in bringing about resolution.

6.15 If a parent or staff member approaches another CST community member in circumstances where application of this Policy would be appropriate, the person approached needs to insist that the person involved follow the proper procedure. The first step will be to meet directly with the person with whom they have an issue.

6.16 Where a student has a concern that would be appropriately dealt with under this Policy they will be required to inform and involve their parent/caregiver in the process unless there are exceptional extenuating circumstances. It is expected that in most instances it will be appropriate to involve their parent/caregiver. Where this is not appropriate, the school will ensure that the student has a suitable support person to guide them.

6.17 Vexatious, trivial or previously finalised issues will not be pursued or tolerated.

Process for managing Formal Complaint Proceedings

6.18 It may happen that:

a) after sustained effort a resolution is still not reached through following the steps outlined above; or

b) there is unwillingness by a party to engage in the process outlined above.

In such circumstances Formal Complaint Proceedings will need to take place in order to bring about some form of resolution regarding at least the substantive issues of the disagreement or conflict.

6.19 In order to initiate the Formal Complaint Proceedings any party to the issue (or the facilitator) may make a written complaint addressed to the Principal. Where a disagreement or conflict involves the Principal, the matter should be referred in
writing directly to the Executive Director of Christian Schools Tasmania. Where a disagreement or conflict involves the Executive Director, the matter should be referred in writing directly to the Board Chair of Christian Schools Tasmania.

6.20 This escalation should not happen while there is still the chance for resolution to be achieved through continued discussion, because it limits the possibility to resolve the relational difficulties that are often central in a conflict.

6.21 The complaint must be written and contain sufficient and specific detail of the basis of the disagreement or conflict, whilst having regard for matters of confidentiality and competing duties of care.

6.22 On receiving a written complaint, the Principal, Executive Director or Board Chair is responsible for undertaking Formal Complaint Proceedings, with the intent to resolve the substantive issues of the disagreement or conflict.

6.23 Christian Schools Tasmania is committed to dealing promptly with issues as they arise.

6.24 At the time the complaint is acknowledged a timeframe for the Formal Complaint Proceedings will be discussed and agreed to.

6.25 When undertaking Formal Complaint Proceedings, Principal, Executive Director or Board Chair will ensure that all relevant parties:

   a) are informed in writing of the complaint;
   b) have the opportunity to place their version on the record; and
   c) are informed that they have the opportunity to bring along a support person to a meeting if they would like to.

6.26 The Principal, Executive Director or Board Chair will assist the parties to attempt to reach a resolution, personally or through a delegate, by facilitating a meeting and mediating discussion.

6.27 Procedural fairness must be exercised in any Formal Complaint Proceedings. This ensures that all the parties involved will receive a fair hearing and any final decision is without bias. The principles of procedural fairness are as follows:

   a) The person considering the issue will act impartially;
   b) Anyone involved in the matter has the right to be heard fully;
   c) Anyone involved has the right to have a support person present;
   d) All relevant information will be taken into account;
   e) Where a conflict of interest arises or is perceived to arise, a mutually acceptable independent person may be brought in.

6.28 Accurate and appropriate notes of meetings will be kept with due regard to the confidentiality of the people involved.

6.29 Subsequent to these proceedings, the Principal, Executive Director or Board Chair may initiate appropriate action within the school community where agreed by the parties as part of any resolution to the disagreement, conflict or complaint.
6.30 The Principal, Executive Director or Board Chair will maintain records of the Formal Complaint Proceedings and the outcome. These will include any statements made by the parties involved. These records will be kept and used in accordance with the conditions of the Commonwealth Privacy Act (1988).

6.31 If a resolution has not been reached within the initially agreed timeframe (or extended time as mutually agreed), either of the parties involved may request the matter be referred, with full details, to the Christian Schools Tasmania Executive Director or Board Chair.

6.32 The Executive Director or Board Chair will make a decision regarding the substantive issues with reference to all the written material provided and may make further enquiry or meet with the people involved if deemed appropriate.

6.33 The Executive Director or Board Chair will inform each party of the decision.

6.34 Any request for review of the process and outcome of this decision may be addressed through the Executive Director or Board Chair to the Christian Schools Tasmania Board. The Board may make recommendations as they see fit (including, but not limited to, the appointing of an external mediator).

6.35 All parties to the Formal Complaint Proceedings will be notified of the findings of the Board review.

6.36 At the end of any conflict resolution process, actions taken will be evaluated and procedures reviewed. This evaluation and review will be initiated by the facilitator at the level of resolution (e.g. Principal, Executive Director or Board appointed external mediator).

7. Acknowledgements

Conflict Resolution Policy (Northern Territory Christian Schools)
Peacewise - Peacemaking Principles (www.peacewise.org.au)