



**Diocese of Toowoomba**  
Catholic Schools

# Investigation guidelines

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## Purpose

These guidelines describe the recommended steps to be taken in investigations conducted by Toowoomba Catholic Schools (TCS), to ensure that investigations are dealt with in accordance with the principles of natural justice and procedural fairness.

These guidelines are underpinned by the principles that investigations should be

- **timely** - investigations should be conducted as promptly as possible
- **thorough** - all appropriate lines of inquiry are followed and considered
- **fair** - all parties have a fair hearing
- **focused on resolution** for all parties.

## To whom it applies

All schools / colleges and the Toowoomba Catholic Schools Office (TCSO) are to follow these guidelines. These guidelines also apply to investigations involving volunteers.

## Related policies and procedures

- Toowoomba Catholic Schools Employment policy
- Toowoomba Catholic Schools Workplace bullying and harassment procedure
- Toowoomba Catholic Schools Anti-discrimination, equal opportunity and addressing sexual harassment procedure
- Toowoomba Catholic Schools Disciplinary action procedure
- Toowoomba Catholic Schools Employee grievance resolution procedure
- Toowoomba Catholic Schools Student Protection processes and guidelines

## Guidelines

### Level 1 investigations

1. A Level 1 investigation will be conducted where all of the following criteria are met
  - a complaint, allegation or report (in any form) which alleges conduct or behaviour by a staff member, principal or volunteer (the respondent) that contravenes the TCS Code of Conduct or any TCS policy, procedure or guideline
  - the alleged conduct, if proven, would warrant either no or low-level disciplinary action only
  - the principal, or Director: People and Engagement Services (Director: PES) if the allegation is about the principal, considers the matter could be dealt with effectively at the local level.
2. Level 1 investigations may also result from one or more allegations of minor behaviour or conduct by the respondent. This may include, but is not limited to
  - lateness for or poor attendance at work
  - taking long breaks
  - excessive personal phone calls during work time
  - inappropriate comments at work
  - consistent poor attitude towards work colleagues/students/parents/visitors
  - minor grievances
  - minor incidents as defined by the Student Protection processes and guidelines.

3. Level 1 investigations (apart from those resulting from allegations against principals) will be coordinated locally by principals, managers and supervisors in consultation with Professional Standards.
4. Professional Standards must be contacted at the outset of any Level 1 investigation to provide further information and/or assistance.
5. Resolving Level 1 investigations is the responsibility of the principal, manager or supervisor (or nominated person where the allegation is against the principal), however advice can be sought at any time from Professional Standards to help formulate a plan to effectively address the issue.
6. Strict confidentiality shall be maintained at all times.
7. If the allegation is against a principal, the Director: PES will determine the appropriate person to conduct the assessment and intervention at the school level.
8. An investigation will generally commence with a 'private conversation', where the concerns are raised by the principal, manager, supervisor or nominated person with the respondent.
9. In the private conversation in a Level 1 investigation, the following points should be addressed
  - the detail of the allegations against the respondent
  - the response from the respondent – noting that the respondent may need more time to provide a response
  - confidentiality in terms of information sharing
  - that the respondent can access the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
10. A respondent may admit to allegations made against them. Where this occurs, the inappropriate behaviour will then be addressed through documented management guidance and/or correction.
11. Conciliation/mediation may be provided if desired by the complainant.
12. Should the respondent deny or contest the allegation/s against them, the principal, manager or supervisor (or nominated person where the allegation is against the principal) must decide whether further information gathering is required or whether management guidance will suffice.
13. The decision regarding whether and how further information should be gathered will depend on factors such as the seriousness of the allegation/s, the attitude of the complainant/s, any records held in relation to the respondent and the likelihood of the allegation/s being able to be substantiated given the circumstances.
14. Where the assessment deems further action is warranted, the principal, manager or supervisor (or nominated person where the allegation is against the principal) will formulate a plan to address any inappropriate behaviour or conduct and provide support as required. This may include mediation and/or conciliation, management correction and guidance, or escalation to a higher level if warranted.
15. The resolution of all Level 1 investigations must be documented and provided to Professional Standards. Documentation must include
  - the details and circumstances of the reported matter
  - the action taken by the principal, manager or supervisor (or nominated person where the allegation is against the principal) to assess the matter, and
  - the outcome.

16. The outcome should also document the respondent's account of the incident, state whether or not the behaviour alleged has been admitted to or not by the respondent, and clear details of the advice/guidance that has been provided to the respondent.
17. The outcome should also indicate if the behaviour alleged is assessed to be contrary to the TCS Code of Conduct or any other relevant policy, procedure or guideline.
18. At the completion of the Level 1 investigation and following review of the matter by the Director: PES, the respondent will be formally advised of the outcome by the principal, manager or supervisor, which should occur in writing.
19. Where the matter is not able to be resolved through a Level 1 investigation, consideration will be given to undertaking a higher-level investigation.
20. Where a student is involved, their parent/carer is to be advised in writing of the completion of the investigation unless there are extraordinary reasons why this should not occur, in which case the reasons should be endorsed by Professional Standards and then documented.
21. Any other complainants (including students) are also advised of the completion of the investigation.
22. All documentation should be kept on a confidential file at school level, or at the TCSO if the report concerns the principal or a staff member of TCSO.
23. A copy of all documentation is also to be submitted to the Director: PES and stored securely.

## **Level 2 investigations**

1. A Level 2 investigation will be conducted where all of the following criteria are met
  - a complaint, allegation or report (in any form) has been received which alleges conduct or behaviour by a staff member, principal or volunteer (the respondent) that contravenes the TCS Code of Conduct or any TCS policy, procedure or guideline
  - the alleged conduct, if proven, would warrant formal disciplinary action.
2. Level 2 investigations commence once allegation/s amounting to serious performance, behaviour or conduct concerns by a staff member, principal or volunteer are received. This may include, but is not limited to
  - instances where the Director: PES determines further action is required following a Queensland Police Service (QPS) investigation
  - discrimination, bullying or harassment
  - failing to follow a reasonable and lawful direction from a principal, manager or supervisor
  - verbal or physical abuse
  - improper use of finances or other workplace resources (motor vehicle, internet, etc)
  - endangering others through irresponsible or negligent actions
  - using or threatening physical violence
  - serious neglect of duty
  - deliberate damage to workplace property
  - being under the influence of alcohol, drugs or other prohibited substance
  - professional misconduct as defined by the Student Protection processes and guidelines.
3. Where a Level 2 investigation is determined, the following steps should be followed as appropriate to the particular circumstances of the allegation/s.

#### 4. Step one: initial considerations

- 4.1. Level 2 investigations commence with notification to the Director: PES as the intake point, which may involve the use of a prescribed form, such as in relation to investigations undertaken under the Student Protection processes and guidelines.
- 4.2. When the Director: PES receives an allegation warranting a Level 2 investigation, the Director: PES will consult with relevant personnel and the following initial actions will occur
  - a. the Director: PES will nominate an appropriate person to investigate the allegation/s (the 'investigator') and provide a clear scope for the investigation
  - b. the Director: PES will ensure in nominating the investigator that there are no issues of bias or conflict of interest
  - c. if the Director: PES determines that an actual or perceived conflict of interest exists in undertaking the role of decision maker for the outcome of the investigation, or is otherwise unable to undertake this role, then the Director: PES will nominate a suitable delegate
  - d. the Director: PES will conduct a risk assessment to determine if it is appropriate for the respondent to be suspended while the investigation is occurring. This risk assessment will include consideration of
    - i. the seriousness of the respondent's alleged behaviour, such that it could possibly lead to dismissal
    - ii. whether the respondent would represent a danger to themselves or others if left in the workplace and
    - iii. whether the respondent will tamper with or remove evidence relevant to the investigation if left in the workplace
  - e. if the person is a volunteer, they may be excluded from the school until the matter is resolved and any contact with the school will be with the explicit approval of the principal
  - f. the Director: PES will consider whether the suspension/exclusion will be made known to staff and if so, then a statement in this regard will be developed
  - g. all reasonable steps will be taken to ensure that confidentiality is maintained during the investigation
  - h. emotional support and pastoral care will be provided to the complainant, respondent against whom the allegation has been made, and any others involved.

#### 5. Step two: informing the respondent

- 5.1. The Director: PES or delegate (usually the respondent's line manager) shall, as soon as practicable, arrange for a private conversation to be held to inform the respondent that an allegation has been made against them, the nature of the allegation and that an investigation is being conducted.
- 5.2. During the private conversation, the respondent will be advised that they will receive a letter detailing the allegation/s and will have an opportunity to respond in due course. The respondent will be advised that they do not have to provide a response during the private conversation.
- 5.3. If the respondent is an employee, they will be reminded of the confidential counselling services available to all employees through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
- 5.4. Confidentiality requirements will be discussed with the respondent during the private conversation.

6. **Step three: informing parents/carers (where applicable)**
  - 6.1. If the allegation/s relates to a student at the school, the parent/carer of the student/s central to the allegation/s will be contacted by the Director: PES or delegate and the following issues discussed
    - a. that an allegation has been made and is being investigated
    - b. how it is being investigated
    - c. parents'/carers' permission for student/s to be interviewed
    - d. parents'/carers' views, concerns and support needs
    - e. communication process for the parent/carer to be updated about the investigation and other related issues
    - f. the need for confidentiality.
  - 6.2. If the context and nature of the allegation involves other students (eg other students named as witnesses) and they also need to be interviewed, the above guidelines relating to parents/carers will be followed.
  - 6.3. Where the allegation does not involve a student, the investigation moves to Step four.
7. **Step four: information gathering - witness interviews, review of documentation and supporting material**
  - 7.1. The investigator will gather all relevant information and conduct witness interviews within the scope of the investigation.
  - 7.2. Witnesses will be advised that they may have a support person present if they elect to do so, however this is not necessarily required.
  - 7.3. Witnesses will be advised of confidentiality requirements by the investigator.
  - 7.4. It may be necessary to conduct more than one interview with a witness.
8. **Step five: information gathering - respondent response**
  - 8.1. In the course of the investigation, the respondent will be provided with the specific details of the allegation/s in an investigation letter and will be asked to provide a response to the allegation/s in an interview with the investigator within a reasonable timeframe.
  - 8.2. Prior to the interview, the respondent will be advised that they are able to have a support person and/or employee representative present.
  - 8.3. In addition to the interview, the respondent may elect or be required to provide a written response to the allegation/s.
  - 8.4. The respondent will be advised that they are able to access a copy of the interview notes or recording (as applicable).
  - 8.5. It may be necessary to conduct more than one interview with the respondent.
9. **Step six: the investigation report and findings**
  - 9.1. At the conclusion of the investigation, the investigator will provide a written report outlining the outcome of the investigation to the Director: PES or nominated delegate.
  - 9.2. Depending on the outcome of the investigation, one of the following decisions will be made
    - a. if the allegation/s are deemed to be without substance, the Unsubstantiated allegation/s section of these guidelines will apply

- b. if the allegation appears to be substantiated, the Substantiated allegation/s section of these guidelines will apply
  - c. if the allegation is not able to be substantiated, the Allegation/s that are not able to be substantiated section of these guidelines will apply.
- 9.3. Any decision relating to the release of information to the community about the allegation/s will be actioned only after consideration and/or consultation with key stakeholders (ie respondent, complainant and principal).
- 9.4. If the allegation/s relates to a student at the school, at the completion of the investigation and following review of the matter by the Director: PES or nominated delegate, the parent/carer of the student concerned is to be advised in writing of the completion of the investigation unless there are extraordinary reasons why this should not occur, in which case the reasons should be documented.
- 9.5. Any other complainants (including students) are also advised of the completion of the investigation.

### **Unsubstantiated allegation/s**

1. When the Director: PES or nominated delegate receives a report regarding the outcome of an investigation which indicates the allegation/s are unsubstantiated, the following will occur
  - a. the Director: PES or delegate will advise the complainant that the investigation has been finalised
  - b. where the complainant is a student, the Director: PES or delegate will advise the student's parents/carers that the investigation has been finalised
  - c. where the allegation is against a staff member or volunteer, the Director: PES or delegate will also advise the principal that the allegation/s were unsubstantiated
  - d. a summary of the allegation and outcome will be provided to the respondent by the Director: PES or delegate in writing, and retained confidentially at TCSO
  - e. no detail will be placed on the employee's file
  - f. TCS will take all reasonable steps to support the respondent.
2. At the school the pastoral care of the respondent will be monitored by the principal.
3. Where the allegation was against a staff member or principal, they will be reminded of the confidential counselling services already available to all employees through the EAP.
4. It may be appropriate for the Director: PES or delegate to provide educative direction and counselling for the complainant (or disciplinary action where the person is an employee) if the complaint is proven to be a vexatious, knowingly false or an exaggerated allegation.

### **Substantiated allegation/s**

1. Where allegation/s are substantiated on the relevant evidentiary test (ie. balance of probabilities) and relate to staff members or principals, the Director: PES or nominated delegate will, in writing, and if appropriate in a meeting with the respondent, communicate the actions the Director: PES or nominated delegate requires. Depending on the facts of each matter, these actions may include, but are not limited to
  - a. further training
  - b. a Disciplinary Action Improvement Plan (DAIP) and/or a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP)
  - c. a letter of warning
  - d. recommendation for dismissal, or in the case of a volunteer - exclusion from Toowoomba Catholic Schools.



2. Where disciplinary action is considered, the Disciplinary Action procedure will be followed.
3. In all cases, the pastoral care of student/s and staff will be monitored and support provided where required.

### **Allegations that are not able to be substantiated**

1. From time to time, the result of an investigation may be that the allegation/s are not able to be substantiated such as in circumstances where there is insufficient evidence to either substantiate or unsubstantiate the allegation/s under the relevant evidentiary test.
2. When the Director: PES or nominated delegate receives a report regarding the outcome of an investigation which indicates the allegation/s are not able to be substantiated, the following will occur
  - a. the Director: PES or delegate will advise the complainant that the investigation has been finalised, unless further evidence comes to hand
  - b. where the complainant is a student, the Director: PES or delegate will advise the student's parents/carers that the investigation has been finalised
  - c. where the allegation is against a staff member or volunteer, the Director: PES or delegate will also advise the principal that the allegation/s were not able to be substantiated
  - d. a summary of the allegation and outcome will be provided to the respondent by the Director: PES or delegate in writing, and retained confidentially at the TCSO
  - e. TCS will take all reasonable steps to support the respondent.
3. At the school the pastoral care of the respondent will be monitored by the principal. Where the allegation was against a staff member or principal, they will be reminded of the confidential counselling services already available to all employees through the EAP.

### **Investigations involving registered teachers**

1. When TCS deals with an allegation of harm caused, or likely to be caused, to a child because of the conduct of a relevant teacher, the Director: PES or delegate will, as soon as practicable, notify the Queensland College of Teachers in accordance with the requirements of section 76 of the Education (Queensland College of Teachers) Act 2005.
2. As soon as practicable after TCS stops dealing with the allegation for any reason, the Director: PES or delegate will give notice to the Queensland College of Teachers as to the outcome of TCS's dealing with the allegation, in accordance with the requirements of section 77 of the Education (Queensland College of Teachers) Act 2005.

### **Authority**

The Investigations guideline are the responsibility of the Director: People and Engagement Services. Any changes to this guideline can only be made with approval from the Director: People and Engagement Services or the Executive Director: Catholic Schools.

### **Version control and change history**

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## Level 1 investigation flowchart

Level 1 investigations will be conducted where all of the following criteria are met

- a complaint, allegation or report (in any form) has been received which alleges conduct or behaviour that contravenes the TCS Code of Conduct, or any TCS policy, procedure or guideline
- the alleged conduct, if proven, warrants no or low level disciplinary action
- the principal (or Director: Human Resources if the allegation is about the Principal), considers the matter could be dealt with effectively at the local level

- advise the Director: Human Resources of the allegation/s
- formulate plan including seeking any other required information

Conduct a private conversation

- provide detail of the allegations against the respondent
- obtain the response from the respondent, acknowledging that the respondent may need more time to provide a complete response
- discuss the need to maintain confidentiality
- remind respondent they can access the EAP

Further action needed?

No

End of matter

Yes

Does the respondent admit to the allegations?

No

Is further action warranted?

No

End of matter

Yes

Yes

- formulate plan to address any inappropriate behaviour or conduct; this may include management correction and guidance, professional development, mediation/ conciliation

gather further information and determine course of action

Provide documentation to the Professional Standards team that includes

- details and circumstances of the reported matter
- action taken by the principal, manager or supervisor to assess the matter
- the outcome, including the respondent's account of the incident

Professional Standards team review the material and confirm the outcome.

Respondent is provided with a written outcome and any plan that has been developed.

Any complainants should be advised that the investigation has been completed. If a student is involved, their parent/carer is to be advised.

## Level 2 investigation flowchart

Level 2 investigations will be conducted where the following criteria are met

- the alleged conduct, if proven, may warrant formal disciplinary action
- includes, but is not limited to: professional misconduct as defined by the Student Protection processes & guidelines; being under the influence of drugs or alcohol; deliberate damage to workplace property; serious neglect of duty; using or threatening physical violence; endangering others through irresponsible or negligent actions; improper use of finances or workplace resources; verbal abuse; failing to follow a reasonable and lawful direction from a supervisor
- instances where the Director: People and Engagement Services (Director: PES) determines further action is required following a Queensland Police Service investigation

Step 1: Director: PES is advised of the allegation/s

- Director: PES will nominate an appropriate person to investigate the allegations and provide scope for the investigation
- Director: PES will determine if it is appropriate for the respondent to be suspended while investigations are occurring

Step 2: principal/ supervisor to conduct a private conversation

- advise that an allegation has been made, the nature of the allegation and that an investigation is being conducted
- advise the respondent that they will have an opportunity to respond in due course and do not need to provide a response during the private conversation
- advise the respondent they will receive a letter with details of allegations and sufficient time to provide a response
- discuss the need to maintain confidentiality and remind respondent they can access the EAP

Step 3: principal or delegate to inform parents/ care providers (where applicable)

- advise that an allegation has been made and is being investigated
- outline the investigation, need for confidentiality and the best method of communicating with the parent/carer throughout the investigation
- obtain parent/carer permission for students to be interviewed and discuss any support needs

Step 4: information gathering: witness interviews, review of documents and other supporting information

- the investigator will gather all relevant information and conduct witness interviews
- witnesses are permitted to have a support person if they wish to; witnesses will be advised of confidentiality requirements; more than one interview of witnesses may be required

Step 5: information gathering: respondent response

- the respondent will be provided with the specific details of the allegations in an investigation letter and asked to provide a response to the allegations in an interview
- in the letter, the respondent will be advised that they are able to have a support person/employee representative present; and that more than one interview may be required
- in addition to the interview, the respondent may be required to provide a written response to the allegations
- the respondent will be advised that they are able to access a copy of the interview notes or recording (as applicable)

Step 6: investigation report, findings and decision

The investigator will provide a written report outlining the outcome of the investigation to the Director: PES or delegate. Each allegation will be addressed individually and one of the following decisions will be made

- 1) unsubstantiated allegation: the allegation is deemed to be without foundation or substance
- 2) substantiated allegation: the allegation appears to be substantiated
- 3) not able to be substantiated: there is insufficient evidence to either prove or disprove the allegation

Step 7: outcome

- a summary of the allegation/s, outcome and the SM:SHR's decision on further actions will be provided to the respondent
- depending on the outcome, further actions may include further training or professional development, counselling, or where disciplinary action is to be taken, the Disciplinary action procedure will be followed
- the Director:PES or delegate will advise the complainant that the investigation has been finalised; if the complainant is a student, the parents/ carers will also be informed
- where TCS deals with an allegation of harm caused, or likely to be caused, to a child because of the conduct of a registered teacher, the Director:PES or delegate will, as soon as practicable, notify the Queensland College of Teachers in accordance with section 76 of the *Education (Queensland College of Teachers) Act 2005*. As soon as TCS stops dealing with the allegation, the Director:PES will give notice to the Queensland College of Teachers under section 77 of the Act.