



## BRINGING A CONCERN POLICY: PARENT PROCEDURE

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### Introduction

At Michael Oak we learn and live as a community. We strive to make our school and all involved in it safe, well cared for and happy. We wish to make good friends and respect, trust and care for one another. We wish to give our best in all that we do.

As part of our Waldorf approach to education, we strive to teach our students to resolve issues as soon as possible, preferably directly with the person with whom they are in conflict or with whom they have an issue. We strive to give them the tools and the confidence to do this in a positive and constructive manner. But we are also aware that these difficult conversations can be a challenge for some, and so we also encourage the support of a third party to help navigate or mediate the challenges, where necessary.

In support of this intention we have a clearly defined set of Codes of Conduct for pupils, members of staff and parents, which form part of the formal agreements that we enter into at our school. In addition, we have formal Disciplinary Policies and Procedures to rely upon when the actions of our pupils or members of staff are not in line with these Codes.

This Procedure for a Parent Bringing a Concern outlines how we deal with challenges, difficulties, complaints and conflicts that may arise. Parents are requested to honour the Code of Conduct and the processes outlined below should they wish to bring a concern.

### Section A: Initiating your Concern

#### 1. What is a concern?

At Michael Oak, a 'concern' is defined as any dissatisfaction about the school that needs to be addressed in order to be resolved. This may be related to the actions of pupils (individuals and/or groups), members of staff, or parents.

#### 2. Who raises the concern?

A concern should be raised by the parent experiencing that concern. No concern based on hearsay will be tabled or dealt with.

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Concerns raised on behalf of another parent (individual) may only be done so with the other person's specific knowledge and consent. It is assumed that this will be done in the spirit of assisting a parent who, for a valid reason, is unable to raise the issue themselves.

Issues raised as a collective (group) will be managed according to point 3(f) or 3(g) below.

## 3. Where to raise concerns?

- a. Where a concern regards a specific teacher or therapist or the school counsellor, the parent is to first approach that person directly by email, outlining the nature of the concern and requesting a meeting with them.
- b. Where a matter concerns a sports coach, the parent should raise the concern with the sports coordinator.
- c. If either party feels unable to have a one-on-one meeting, they should approach the chair of the Faculty concerned, who will set up a facilitated meeting between the parent and the staff member.
- d. Where the matter concerns any administration or support staff, it must be taken to the School Administrator.
- e. Where the matter concerns another parent, it should be first raised with that parent where appropriate. If the parent feels it is not advisable to approach the other parent directly, he/she should approach the class teacher or guardian, who will set up a facilitated meeting of the two parents if this is deemed necessary.
- f. When a concern or allegation is brought that involves more than a single individual (e.g. a whole class), then the matter will go first to the class teacher / guardian who will decide if the concern will be discussed in a group/class context or will be dealt with on an individual or small group basis. Should the teacher decide that a meeting of all the class parents is necessary, the relevant faculty and College would be informed of the matter prior to this meeting being set up.
- g. Where a concern is a broad school-related matter (such as school security or languages), parents may raise the concern with the Administration or relevant Faculty, which will decide whether it needs to be taken to the College of Teachers ('College') or any other mandated group within the school.
- h. Should a pedagogical or disciplinary concern (relating to a teacher or student) be sent to the Primary Forum, the High School Forum or the Board of Trustees, they will not table it for discussion but will immediately redirect it to the relevant teacher, Faculty or College.

**NOTE:** The term 'Faculty' refers to the Kindergarten, Primary and High School Faculties, while the term 'Administration' refers to the School Administration Body.

## Section B: Resolving your Concern

### 4. Step 1 - initial meeting

- a. The relevant staff member may not be able to deal with the issue immediately, but a meeting with the parent will be set up at an appropriate time within a week.

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- b. Meetings will take place by prior arrangement only, to deal with only the specific concern. (See section 7 below on Meetings.)
- c. Where the chair of the Faculty has been involved in setting up a facilitated meeting, he/she will consult with both parent and teacher/therapist/counsellor/coach to ascertain whether the matter has been satisfactorily resolved for both parties.
- d. If the concern is not adequately resolved to the satisfaction of both parties through the meeting, it will be taken to the relevant Faculty chair who will decide whether the matter is for the attention of a small group, or the entire Faculty.
- e. If the unresolved matter concerns administration or support staff, the Administrator or the aggrieved party may take the matter to the Trustees.

### 5. Step 2 - should the matter be referred to the relevant Faculty or Trustees

The Faculty chair or the Trustees will:

- a. Acknowledge the communication.
- b. Consult with the relevant parties to establish a clear understanding of the matter.
- c. Decide whether to involve other relevant parties or another colleague.
- d. Decide on the best way forward.
- e. Ensure there is follow-up until the issue has been resolved to the satisfaction of all parties.
- f. Consult with all parties at the end of this process to determine whether they are satisfied with the outcome.
- g. In the matter concerning a teacher or pupil, if no satisfactory outcome has been reached, the Faculty chair will refer the matter to College, and inform the parent of this step.
- h. If the matter concerns administration or support staff, the Trustees are expected to make every effort to resolve this matter, but if at least two meetings have been held and the parent feels that the matter remains unresolved, then the Trustees may make a final and binding decision in the matter.

### 6. Step 3 - should the Faculty refer the matter to College

College will:

- a. Acknowledge the communication.
- b. Assess the nature of the concern.
- c. Implement an enquiry process, involving both parties, as well as others where necessary.
- d. Decide whether a mediator is required.
- e. If a mediator is required, then College can identify a mediator from its ranks, or request a Trustee or the School Administrator to act as mediator.
- f. If no mediator is required, then College must inform the parent of the College decision, which is final.
- g. If mediation is required, and the matter remains unresolved after at least two meetings, College may choose to make a final and binding decision.
- h. College will inform the Faculty and other relevant bodies, including the Trustees where appropriate.

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## Section C: Etiquette

### 7. Meetings

- a. need to remain within the original parameters of the appointment regarding:
  - i. who attends the meeting
  - ii. what issues are to be discussed
  - iii. the timeframe of the meeting
- b. If the matter has been referred for facilitation / mediation, the Faculty chair or the School Administrator (whichever is relevant) will decide which faculty member or other staff member will act as facilitator.
- c. Minutes must be taken. Audio recordings of meetings are not permitted unless there is prior agreement by all parties attending the meeting.
- d. Should the meeting become counter-productive, the convener / mediator / facilitator has the right to postpone or terminate the meeting.

### 8. Communication

- a. Open respectful communication is essential and is expected from all parties.
- b. In order to maintain a healthy solution-oriented approach, it is requested that parents speak directly to the people involved as outlined above, and not to others who are not directly involved in holding the process. As such, parents are asked to refrain from raising personal concerns in general school or public meetings or forums.
- c. E-mail communication may be used to request a meeting and outline a concern, but not as an ongoing means of communication – especially regarding a matter while it is in process.
- d. Staff and parents should not engage in any informal discussions about a matter in process, whether via telephone, email, cell phone, WhatsApp or in conversation.
- e. The parent will receive a formal response via the relevant staff member, Faculty or College, to communicate that the issue is in process, as well as to communicate any decisions made.
- f. The intention is to deal with the issue as timeously as possible.

### 9. Confidentiality

- a. The school will deal with concerns that parents bring with discretion and integrity. The safety, well-being and protection of pupils, staff and parents are central to all decisions the school makes about confidentiality.

The following guidelines apply:

  - i. Staff may not be bound to holding a matter confidentially, as in our experience this limits healthy options for dealing with a matter.
  - ii. There are very few situations where absolute confidentiality is offered. At most, limited confidentiality will apply, based on the school's discretion.
- b. The school has the right to maintain confidentiality at their discretion and where legally permitted to do so.

We hope that by following the process as outlined above, we will together be able to resolve concerns amicably, respectfully, efficiently and effectively.

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## Adoption

This procedure was approved by the College of Teachers at their meeting of 17 August 2023.

The procedure was approved by the Board of Trustees at their meeting of 31 August 2023.

This Policy was last edited by Ann Kantey, Matthew Stodal and Jeannine Twine 3 March 2023 and Fiona Grant on 7 August 2023

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## IN BRIEF:

Where to raise the concern:

With Teachers, Therapists and School Counsellors

- Email the person concerned and request a meeting; or
- If it is a problem to do so, then approach the relevant Faculty chair and request a facilitated meeting.

With Sports Coaches / extra-mural coaches:

- Contact the Sports and Extra-Mural Coordinator

With Admin or Support staff

- Contact the School Administrator

With Parents

- Raise directly with parent concerned where appropriate; or
- Ask the class teacher to set up a facilitated meeting where this is felt to be advisable.

If it is a class matter (whole or part of a class)

- Raise the matter with the class teacher / guardian.

If it is a broader matter affecting several classes

- Raise the matter with the School Administrator or relevant Chair of Faculty

No Pedagogical or Disciplinary concerns to be addressed by Parent Forums.