

Blue Mountains Steiner School

Policies and Procedures



The BMSS Report Service for Raising Matters of Serious Concern

PURPOSE

To develop and implement a process by which students, parents and community members can confidently raise concerns in the knowledge that they will be listened to and professionally managed in a timely, confidential and appropriate manner. BMSS is committed to ensuring the School and all of its employees, act and maintain a culture of compliance and ethical behavioral standards. These standards must at all times be compliant with the law, and the School's ethical standards, as set out in our Code of Conduct policies.

The BMSS School Council recognizes that any genuine commitment to detecting and preventing illegal, unethical and unsatisfactory conduct or misconduct must include an appropriate mechanism whereby students (former and current), parents, staff and the broader school community, can report their concerns freely and without fear of repercussion. This policy provides such a mechanism, by encouraging the reporting of such conduct and also acting as a preventative measure to actively discourage and future wrongdoings.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following BMSS policies:

- BMSS Child Protection Policy
- BMSS Bullying and Harassment Policy
- BMSS Code of Conduct Staff, Parents and Carers / Students/ Volunteers
- BMSS WHS Policy
- BMSS Safe and Supportive Environment Policy
- BMSS Grievance Policy

Blue Mountains Steiner School would encourage all students, parents, staff members or other persons involved with the School who wish to make a report in connection with misconduct to utilize the processes outlined in the above policies in the first instance.

When there is a reasonable concern that these policies and reporting procedures have not been appropriately adhered to a report should be made through the BMSS Report Service for Raising a Serious Concern.

WHAT TYPES OF MATTERS SHOULD BE REPORTED UNDER THIS POLICY?

- Child Abuse
- Unsafe work practices
- Coercion, harassment or discrimination
- Dishonest, fraudulent or corrupt conduct or practices
- Misleading or deceptive conduct, including conduct or representation which amount to improper or misleading accounting or financial reporting practices
- Illegal acts including theft, drug sale or use, violence or threatened violence and criminal damage against property
- Breaches of relevant laws, regulations, by-laws
- Any other conduct which may cause injury to individuals or loss to the school or be otherwise detrimental to individuals or to the School

Because BMSS understands that it often takes many years for the survivors of child abuse to come forward, allegations of past child protection breaches may also be reported.

WHAT IF I AM WRONG?

There is an expectation that any concerns raised will be made in good faith and founded on truthful events. All concerns will be thoroughly investigated to ensure that any matters raised can be substantiated. Abuse of the confidential reporting process will not be tolerated and will be treated as a serious breach of the School's Code of Conduct.

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DO I HAVE TO LEAVE MY NAME?

The service is confidential so you do not have to leave your name. However, it would greatly assist with the investigation and resolution of any matter if the name and details of the reporter are known.

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE REPORTS?

All matters will be investigated by the Principal or School Chaplain in a manner subject to ethical and fairness principles. The investigation may include informing the person against whom the allegations have been made, involvement of third parties such as the ombudsman, Children's Guardian etc., investigation, notification to the Chair of Council and a full report.

HOW TO MAKE A REPORT

A student, parent, staff member or member of the public who wishes to make a report in connection with reportable conduct can contact the Principal or School Chaplain by telephone, email or in writing.

It is not necessary for there to be conclusive evidence of the conduct sought to be reported, as long as there is reasonable grounds to believe the truth of the matter and the report is made in good faith. Wherever possible, supporting information should be provided at the time of making the report.

The School Principal or School Chaplain will commence the initial collection of data, referring or escalating the matter to the relevant external regulatory body and to the School Council. Where a report is about a Council Member or Executive Staff member, that person will be excluded from the review process to ensure transparency.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Reports may be made anonymously. Where a person wishes to remain anonymous, their identity will not be disclosed, unless required by law.

The information provided will be held securely and kept confidential, subject to the need to disclose the information to conduct an investigation and fulfil any reporting obligations.

However, it may assist the investigation if the name and contact details of the reporter are made available at the time of making the report, to enable any clarification or further information to be sought.

Where the identity of the reporter is disclosed or would be obvious, steps will be taken in consultation with the reporter should it be necessary to protect the reporter. The steps may include leave of absence or relocation.

The identity or any information that could lead to the identity of a person who has made a report will not be released to any person who is not involved in the investigation/resolution of the matter.

Where there is evidence that a person has made a false report of reportable conduct, then that conduct itself would be considered a serious matter and render the person concerned subject to a disciplinary proceeding. Similarly where any person takes retribution against a person who has made a report in good faith, then that conduct itself would be considered a serious matter and would render the person concerned subject to disciplinary measures. All persons making a report are assured that in making a report they will not be personally disadvantaged by dismissal, demotion, any form of harassment, discrimination, victimisation or current or future bias. Any person who, having made a report, believes that they have been personally disadvantaged has an automatic right of appeal to the Headmaster or Chairperson, whose decision will be complied with.

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WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A REPORT IS MADE?

When report is made:

- the process will be explained to you;
- you will be asked about whether you wish to remain anonymous;
- you will be asked to provide details of the reportable conduct and you may be asked questions about the reportable conduct;
- a report will be compiled
- The principal or School Chaplain will conduct an investigation into the conduct.

The School is committed to ensuring the Principal or School Chaplain are appropriately qualified for this role and readily accessible. Further, that they do not have an actual or perceived conflict and are impartial. Where the Principal, School Chaplain or Council Chairperson determines that the allegations are of a very serious nature, an external investigator may be engaged from AIS.

The conduct of the investigation will be in a manner that is transparent (to the extent permitted by the sensitivity of the reportable conduct and any request for anonymity), objective and without bias.

The investigation will typically include the following steps:

1. the collection of relevant information;
2. person/s against whom allegations have been made will be informed of the substance of the allegations against them and provided with an opportunity to respond;
3. consideration will be given to all submissions that are made, taking into account relevant matters and not taking into account irrelevant matters;
4. School Council informed of the progress and status of the investigation; and
5. the person making the report informed of the progress and outcome of the investigation (if they request to be so informed).

In certain circumstances it may be necessary to inform statutory authorities of reportable conduct, such as the Ombudsman, the Children's Guardian and the Police, and report in relation to the conduct and outcome of the investigation.

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The School is committed to rectifying any wrongdoing verified by the investigation.

ABUSE OF REPORTING PROCESS

Reports should be made in good faith and based on facts believed to be true. Abuse of the confidential reporting process will amount to a serious breach of the School's Code of Conduct.

Intentionally making false reports will give rise to disciplinary action, where appropriate. Similarly any action taken in retribution against a person who has made a report in good faith will give rise to disciplinary action.

MONITORING AND TRAINING

The School will monitor and review this policy regularly to assess its effectiveness in encouraging the reporting of reportable conduct, protection of persons making reports, and investigation of reports.

Education and training about the procedures involved under this BMSS Report Service Policy will be provided to those involved in managing or investigating disclosures. The School's community will also be educated and kept informed in relation to the Policy and the protections and procedures contained therein.