



VILLANOVA COLLEGE



# WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION POLICY

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## INTRODUCTION

Villanova College is committed to the highest standards of ethical behaviour, corporate compliance and good governance in all of its operations. This commitment is inseparable from the College's Augustinian values of interiority, search for truth and community. St Augustine's conviction that every person is called to wisdom, integrity and the quality of community life provides the moral foundation for this policy. Transparency and accountability are not merely legal obligations - they are expressions of the College's character and its duty of care to the people it serves.

The College recognises that whistleblowers play a vital role in identifying and calling out misconduct. People who raise concerns in good faith may face significant personal and professional risk in doing so. This policy exists to make it safe to speak up, to ensure that disclosures are handled properly and confidentially, and to protect anyone who comes forward from any form of retaliation or detriment. This policy does not replace other reporting mechanisms at the College, including those for child protection, grievances, equal opportunity, discrimination, harassment or bullying. Where a disclosure relates to matters more appropriately addressed under those frameworks, the whistleblower will be advised accordingly.

This policy operates as a complementary and supplementary mechanism, particularly in circumstances where existing reporting channels have been inadequate, inappropriate or unavailable.

The purpose of this policy is to:

- meet the College's legal obligations under the *Corporations Act 2001 (Cth)* and the *Taxation Administration Act 1953 (Cth)* and to support the College's values and governance framework;
- encourage Workers to report concerns about Reportable Conduct in good faith and without fear;
- provide a clear mechanism for making and receiving disclosures, including anonymously;
- protect the identity of Whistleblowers and ensure that disclosures are handled securely and confidentially;
- ensure that disclosures are investigated fairly, objectively and in a timely manner;
- protect Whistleblowers and any persons assisting in an investigation from detriment; and
- ensure the fair treatment of any person who is the subject of a disclosure.

## DEFINITIONS

In this policy:

**Associate** means a director or company secretary of the College, as that term is defined in the *Corporations Act 2001 (Cth)*.

**Detriment or Detrimental Conduct** includes dismissal, demotion, discrimination, harassment, intimidation, harm or injury to a person, damage to a person's property, reputation, business or financial position, or any other conduct that disadvantages a person. It does not include the management of a Whistleblower's unsatisfactory work performance, provided that management is consistent with the College's performance management framework.

**Eligible Recipient** means a person authorised to receive disclosures that qualify for protection under the *Corporations Act 2001 (Cth)* or the *Taxation Administration Act 1953 (Cth)*, including an officer or senior manager of the College, the College's external auditor, or a legal practitioner for the purpose of obtaining legal advice about whistleblower protections.

**Eligible Whistleblower** means an individual who is, or has been, an officer or employee of the College; a supplier of goods or services to the College (whether paid or unpaid), including their employees; an Associate of the College; or a relative, dependant or spouse of any of those persons.



**Protected Disclosure** means a disclosure of information by an Eligible Whistleblower to an Eligible Recipient, where the Whistleblower has reasonable grounds to suspect that the information concerns misconduct, or an improper state of affairs or circumstances, in relation to the College.

**Reportable Conduct** has the meaning set out in the Scope of Reportable Conduct section of this policy.

**Whistleblower** means an Eligible Whistleblower who makes a Protected Disclosure in accordance with this policy.

**Whistleblower Investigation Officer** means a person appointed by the College to assist in the investigation of a disclosure, who is independent of the Whistleblower Protection Officer.

**Whistleblower Program Team (WP Team)** means the Principal, the Chair of the Board and any appointed Whistleblower Protection Officer(s), collectively responsible for oversight of this policy and its operation.

**Whistleblower Protection Officer (WPO)** means the person or persons appointed by the Principal to receive and oversee whistleblower disclosures. There may be one or more WPOs at any given time. The current WPO(s) will be communicated to staff through the Staff Portal and updated as required. Where no WPO has been appointed or is available, the Principal acts in this role.

**Worker** means any Villanova College employee, whether permanent, fixed term, full-time, part-time or casual; and any volunteer, student, contractor, consultant or anyone who works in any other capacity for Villanova College.

## APPLICATION

This policy applies to all Workers. Former Workers are also covered where their disclosure relates to conduct that occurred during their engagement with the College.

Although they are under no legal obligation to do so, a relative, dependant or spouse of a Worker may also make a disclosure under this policy. Where they do so in good faith, the College will extend to them the same protections that apply to Workers under this policy.

## SCOPE OF REPORTABLE CONDUCT

### What is Reportable Conduct?

A person may make a Protected Disclosure where they have reasonable grounds to suspect that the information concerns misconduct, or an improper state of affairs or circumstances, in relation to the College or a related body corporate. A Whistleblower does not need to be certain that misconduct has occurred - reasonable grounds to suspect is sufficient.

Reportable Conduct includes any past, present or likely future conduct, activity or state of affairs that the Whistleblower has reasonable grounds to suspect constitutes:

- dishonest, corrupt or fraudulent conduct, including theft, bribery or misappropriation of funds;
- illegal conduct, including violence, threatened violence, drug use or dealing, or criminal damage to property;
- a contravention of, or offence against, the *Corporations Act 2001 (Cth)*, the *Taxation Administration Act 1953 (Cth)*, or any other Commonwealth law punishable by imprisonment for 12 months or more;
- a breach of the College's Code of Conduct, internal policies or regulatory obligations;
- misconduct or an improper state of affairs in relation to the tax affairs of the College, including non-compliance with tax laws or tax avoidance behaviour;
- a serious risk to public safety, health or the environment;



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- serious mismanagement of the College's resources or financial position; or
  - conduct designed to conceal any of the above.

Reportable Conduct may relate to the conduct of employees, directors, officers or third parties such as contractors or suppliers. A Whistleblower can still qualify for protection even if their disclosure is ultimately found to be incorrect, provided they had reasonable grounds to suspect misconduct at the time of making the disclosure and acted honestly and in good faith.

### What is NOT Reportable Conduct?

This policy does not apply to personal work-related grievances. A personal work-related grievance is one that relates to the discloser's own employment and has implications primarily for the discloser personally, but does not have significant implications for the College or relate to any conduct constituting a disclosable matter.

Examples of personal work-related grievances that fall outside this policy include interpersonal conflicts between colleagues, decisions about the discloser's promotion or remuneration, and decisions to discipline or terminate the discloser's engagement, where those decisions do not involve a breach of workplace law. Such grievances may be dealt with under the College's Grievance and Dispute Resolution Policy or the applicable Enterprise Agreement.

However, a personal work-related grievance will fall within the scope of this policy where it includes information about misconduct, involves an allegation that the College has breached a law punishable by imprisonment for 12 months or more, or where the discloser has suffered or been threatened with detriment as a result of making or intending to make a disclosure.

## HOW TO MAKE A DISCLOSURE

### Who to report to

A disclosure should be made to the Whistleblower Protection Officer (WPO). The current WPO(s) are listed on the Staff Portal. Where a WPO has not been appointed or is not available, disclosures should be made to the Principal.

Where a disclosure involves allegations against the Principal, it should be made directly to the Chair of the College Board.

A Whistleblower may also make a disclosure directly to the College's external auditor, whose details are published in the College's current Annual Financial Report, and still qualify for protection. Where a disclosure is made to the external auditor, the auditor will, with the consent of the Whistleblower, provide details to the Principal or Chair of the Board as appropriate to initiate the investigation process.

Disclosures may also be made to Stoptline, an independent, confidential whistleblower service for Queensland Catholic Education to report serious misconduct, abuse, or policy breaches. Phone 1300 30 45 50, or email [aob@stoptline.com.au](mailto:aob@stoptline.com.au)

A Whistleblower may also make a disclosure to an external body and still qualify for protection under this policy and the *Corporations Act 2001 (Cth)*, including:

- the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) or the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority (APRA);
- the Commissioner of Taxation, where the disclosure relates to the College's tax affairs; or
- a legal practitioner, for the purpose of obtaining legal advice or representation about whistleblower protections.

In limited circumstances, a disclosure may also be made to a journalist or member of parliament as a public interest or emergency disclosure under the *Corporations Act 2001 (Cth)*. Specific criteria apply and Whistleblowers are encouraged to seek independent legal advice before making such a disclosure.



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## How to report

Disclosures not involving allegations against the Principal should be addressed in writing to the Whistleblower Protection Officer, Villanova College, PO Box 1166 Coorparoo DC QLD 4151, marked Confidential.

Disclosures involving allegations against the Principal or a Director of the College Board should be addressed in writing to the Chair of the Villanova College Board of Directors, PO Box 1166 Coorparoo DC QLD 4151, marked Confidential.

Disclosures may be made anonymously. A Whistleblower may adopt a pseudonym and is not required to identify themselves at any point. The College will make every reasonable effort to investigate an anonymous disclosure based on the information provided.

## What information to include

To assist the College to investigate a disclosure effectively, Whistleblowers should provide as much information as possible, including the date, time and location of the relevant events; the names of persons involved; details of any witnesses; and any available supporting evidence such as documents or correspondence. Any steps already taken to report or resolve the matter should also be noted.

Whistleblowers are not required to provide all of this information to qualify for protection.

## PROTECTION OF WHISTLEBLOWERS

### Protection from detriment

Villanova College will not tolerate any detriment inflicted on a person because they have made, or are believed or suspected to have made, a Protected Disclosure. This protection applies regardless of whether the disclosure is ultimately found to be correct, provided the Whistleblower acted honestly and had reasonable grounds to suspect Reportable Conduct.

The protection also extends to any person who assists or participates in an investigation of a Protected Disclosure.

Anyone found to have engaged in detrimental conduct toward a Whistleblower will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment or engagement. They may also face civil and criminal penalties under the *Corporations Act 2001 (Cth)*.

As soon as practicable after receiving a disclosure, the WPO will assess the risk of detriment against the Whistleblower and take any specific protective action required. This may include permitting the Whistleblower to work from an alternative location, reassigning other staff involved in the relevant matter, or providing access to support services.

A Whistleblower who believes they have suffered detriment in connection with a disclosure should report this to the WPO, Principal or Chair of the Board immediately. The College will treat an allegation of detriment as a disclosure of Reportable Conduct to be investigated in its own right. A Whistleblower may also lodge a complaint with ASIC or APRA.

### Legal protections

A Whistleblower who makes a Protected Disclosure is entitled to the following legal protections:

- immunity from civil, criminal or administrative legal liability (including disciplinary action) arising from the making of the disclosure;
- protection from contractual or other remedies being enforced against them for making the disclosure;
- protection from costs orders in legal proceedings, unless the proceedings are found to be vexatious or the Whistleblower acted unreasonably;



- protection of their identity from disclosure to a court or tribunal, except where the court or tribunal considers it necessary; and
- access to compensation and other remedies if they suffer detriment as a result of making a disclosure.

These protections do not grant immunity for any misconduct by the Whistleblower that is revealed in the course of their disclosure.

### Confidentiality

The College will take all reasonable steps to protect the identity of a Whistleblower. All information relating to a disclosure will be stored securely, and access will be restricted to those directly involved in managing or investigating the disclosure. Communications and documents relating to an investigation will not be sent to email addresses or printers accessible by other staff.

The College will not disclose a Whistleblower's identity, or information that is likely to lead to their identification, without their written consent, unless:

- the disclosure is made to ASIC, APRA, the Commissioner of Taxation or the Australian Federal Police;
- the disclosure is made to a legal practitioner for the purpose of obtaining legal advice or representation; or
- a court or tribunal determines that disclosure is necessary.

The College may disclose information contained in a disclosure, without disclosing the Whistleblower's identity, where: the information does not include identifying details; all reasonable steps have been taken to reduce the risk of identification; and disclosure is reasonably necessary for the purpose of the investigation.

It is an offence under the *Corporations Act 2001 (Cth)* for any person to disclose a Whistleblower's identity or information likely to lead to their identification, without authorisation. The College may take disciplinary action, including termination, against any person who breaches these obligations.

A Whistleblower may choose to disclose their identity when making a report and may also choose to remain anonymous throughout the investigation and after it is finalised. Where a disclosure is made anonymously, the Whistleblower may still communicate with the College through the channel used to make the disclosure.

### Support services

The College acknowledges that making a disclosure can be stressful and personally challenging. The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is available to all employees and their immediate family members at no cost, and provides confidential counselling and professional support. Current EAP contact details are maintained on the Staff Portal.

The College will also provide strategies and practical assistance to help a Whistleblower manage any stress, performance impacts or other challenges that arise during or after an investigation.

### False disclosures

A Protected Disclosure must be made on reasonable grounds and in good faith. A person who knowingly makes a false disclosure, or who uses this policy to disguise a personal or professional grievance, will not be entitled to the protections under this policy and may be subject to disciplinary action, including termination. The disciplinary response will be proportionate to the nature and circumstances of the false disclosure.



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## HANDLING AND INVESTIGATING DISCLOSURES

### Initial assessment

Upon receiving a disclosure, and within five business days where practicable, the WPO will assess whether the disclosure qualifies for protection under this policy and whether a formal investigation is required. Where a disclosure is received anonymously and the College is unable to contact the Whistleblower, the College will investigate to the extent possible based on the information provided.

The assessment will also consider whether there are any conflicts of interest that should be managed before proceeding, and whether external regulatory bodies need to be notified.

### Investigation process

Where a formal investigation is required, the WPO will determine its nature and scope, identify the appropriate investigator or investigators, identify any technical, legal or financial expertise required, and establish a timeframe for completion.

The investigation will be thorough, objective, fair and independent. The investigator will be independent of the Whistleblower, the persons who are the subject of the disclosure, and the business unit involved. The College will engage an external investigator where the allegations are of a serious nature or where additional specialist expertise is required.

The investigation will ordinarily include the following steps, although the process may vary depending on the nature of the disclosure:

1. Full details of the allegations obtained in writing.
2. The person against whom allegations are made (the Respondent) is informed in writing and given an opportunity to respond before any adverse finding is made.
3. Involvement of external parties such as ASIC, APRA or the Australian Federal Police considered as appropriate.
4. Allegations fully investigated and evidence gathered.
5. The Principal or Chair of the College Board determines the appropriate action to be taken.

The objective of an investigation is to determine whether there is sufficient evidence to substantiate or refute the matters disclosed. At the conclusion of the investigation, a written report will be prepared setting out the findings of fact, a determination as to whether the allegations have been substantiated, and any recommended action.

### Keeping the Whistleblower informed

Where the Whistleblower can be contacted (including through anonymous channels), the College will acknowledge receipt of the disclosure within a reasonable period. The Whistleblower will be provided with updates at key stages of the investigation, including when the investigation commences, while it is in progress, and following its conclusion. During an investigation, the Whistleblower will receive a written update at least every three months.

Where appropriate and subject to the privacy of the Respondent, the Whistleblower will be informed of the outcome of the investigation. A copy of the investigation report will not be provided to the Whistleblower.

If there is insufficient information to warrant investigation, or initial assessment reveals there is no case to answer, the Whistleblower will be notified at the earliest opportunity.



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## Board reporting

The Principal will notify the Board of Directors immediately where a disclosure relates to serious or material misconduct. The Principal will also report to the Board at each meeting on the existence and status of any whistleblower disclosures, to enable the Board to address any risk or governance issues at the College. Board reports must not disclose the identity of any Whistleblower, or information likely to lead to their identification, unless the Whistleblower has consented to the disclosure.

## FAIR TREATMENT OF RESPONDENTS

The College is committed to ensuring that any person named in or affected by a disclosure (a Respondent) is treated fairly throughout the process. Disclosures will be handled as confidentially as practicable. A Respondent will be advised of the subject matter of the disclosure as and when required by the principles of natural justice and procedural fairness, and before any adverse action is taken against them.

A Respondent will have the opportunity to respond to any allegations before adverse findings are made. At the conclusion of the investigation, the Respondent will be informed of the outcome, but will not be provided with a copy of the investigation report.

The protection of a Whistleblower's identity does not override the requirement to accord natural justice to a Respondent. The College will manage this balance carefully and with appropriate care for both parties.

## RESPONSIBILITIES

### The Board of Directors

- Approve, oversee and periodically review this policy.
- Receive reports from the Principal on the existence and status of whistleblower disclosures at each Board meeting.
- Act as the primary recipient for disclosures involving allegations against the Principal, via the Chair of the Board.
- Ensure the policy cannot be amended without Board approval.

### The Principal

- Act as the primary Eligible Recipient for internal disclosures not involving allegations against the Principal.
- Appoint one or more Whistleblower Protection Officers and communicate their details to staff via the Staff Portal.
- Notify the Board immediately where a disclosure relates to serious or material misconduct.
- Report to the Board at each meeting on the status of whistleblower disclosures.
- Ensure appropriate training is provided to the WP Team and those involved in managing or investigating disclosures.

### Whistleblower Protection Officer(s)

- Serve as the primary point of contact for Workers seeking information about this policy or wishing to make a disclosure.
- Receive disclosures and assess whether they qualify for protection and whether a formal investigation is required.



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- Appoint a Whistleblower Investigation Officer where required, and oversee the investigation process.
  - Ensure that disclosures involving a director or the Principal are escalated to the Chair of the Board.
  - Protect the confidentiality of the Whistleblower's identity throughout and after the investigation.
  - Assess the risk of detriment to the Whistleblower and take protective action as required.
  - Provide regular updates to the Whistleblower and, at the conclusion of the investigation, inform the Whistleblower of the outcome to the extent appropriate.
  - Maintain a secure and confidential record of all disclosures and investigations.
  - Immediately report concerns about detrimental conduct to the Principal or Chair of the Board.
  - Participate in training as directed by the WP Team.

### Whistleblower Investigation Officer

- Conduct investigations in accordance with this policy, maintaining confidentiality and independence throughout.
- Gather evidence and take steps to protect and preserve evidence from the outset.
- Prepare findings based on a fair and objective assessment of the evidence and formalise those findings in a written report.
- Report progress to the WPO within seven days of appointment and at least every 14 days thereafter.
- Make recommendations to the WPO on how reported misconduct can be stopped, prevented or mitigated in future.

### Human Resources

- Ensure that Workers are made aware of this policy and their rights and obligations under it, including at induction.
- Maintain current EAP provider contact details on the Staff Portal.
- Coordinate and support the implementation of protective measures for Whistleblowers where required.

### Workers

- Report any known or reasonably suspected Reportable Conduct as soon as possible, in accordance with this policy.
- Treat all matters relating to disclosures with the highest level of confidentiality.
- Not engage in, encourage or facilitate detrimental conduct toward any Whistleblower or person assisting in an investigation.
- Cooperate with investigations conducted under this policy.

### Monitoring, review and availability

This policy will be reviewed by the WP Team every two years, or earlier where required by changes to relevant legislation, the College's operations, or best practice guidance from ASIC. Any amendment to this policy requires Board approval.



The College will ensure this policy is accessible to all officers and employees by publishing it on the College's Staff Portal and external website, incorporating it into employee induction information, and holding staff awareness sessions as appropriate. A copy of this policy will be provided to the College's external auditor.

## ACCOUNTABILITY

Role	Responsible For
Board of Directors	Oversight and review of these procedures
Principal	Implementation, compliance, and reporting
Whistleblower Protection Officer (WPO)	Receiving disclosures, managing investigations, and protecting Whistleblower welfare
Director of HR	Policy review and updates, and training compliance
Whistleblower Investigation Officer (WIO)	Conducting investigations and reporting findings
All Workers	Compliance with this policy and these procedures

## ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

Description	Document Type
Villanova College Whistleblower Protection Policy	Policy
Villanova College Code of Conduct	Policy
Villanova College Grievance and Dispute Resolution Policy	Policy
Villanova College Privacy Policy	Policy
Villanova College Conflict of Interest Policy	Policy

## RELEVANT LEGISLATION

The following legislation and standards are relevant to this policy:

- *Corporations Act 2001 (Cth)*
- *Taxation Administration Act 1953 (Cth)*
- *Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth)*
- *Public Interest Disclosure Act 2013 (Cth)*

## REVIEW AND APPROVAL

This policy will be reviewed at least every two years or earlier if required by legislation, system change, or College operations.

Version	Review	Author/s	Authorisation	Approval Date	Next Review
1.0	Updated formatting aligned to Villanova Green & Gold branding; content updated for digital learning and AI references.	Director of HR	Principal	May 2026	2028