

MANAGING COMPLAINTS AND GRIEVANCES POLICY

Rationale

It is in the best interest of the students for there to be a trusting and co-operative relationship between parents and the school so we are committed to resolving complaints with the educational wellbeing of students as our first priority. The Department (and school) recognises a parent's right to make a complaint and its responsibility to provide a framework within which efforts can be made to resolve complaints.

A 'complaint' is an expression of dissatisfaction with an action taken, decision made or service provided, or the failure to provide a service, take action, or make a decision at school.

A complaint is considered to be *resolved* when the complainant and the Department (school, region or central office) agree on an appropriate response or remedy.

A complaint is considered to be *finalised* when the Department (Regional Director or other delegate of the Secretary) has made a final determination of the matter after exhausting the processes set out in this policy.

A complaint is considered to be *unresolved* when agreement cannot be reached on a course of action and/or a remedy, or if the remedy cannot be implemented.

Aims

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that we have a fair, effective and efficient complaint-handling process and so that parents are informed of how they can make a complaint at the school.

This policy does not apply to matters where rights and processes for review and appeal already exist, including:

1. student expulsions
2. complaints about staff that if upheld would constitute misconduct
3. student critical incident matters
4. other criminal matters

Implementation

1. All complaints received are to be recorded and actions taken to resolve the complaint are to be documented. A register of serious complaints will be kept on the administration server.
2. The guiding principles for handling complaints are: visibility, accessibility, responsiveness, objectivity, cost and the protection of privacy.
3. It is expected that when making a complaint, parents and school personnel will:
 - a. show respect and understanding of each other's point of view
 - b. operate within applicable legislation
 - c. acknowledge that their goal is to achieve an outcome acceptable to all parties
 - d. act in good faith and in a calm and courteous manner
 - e. recognise that all parties have rights and responsibilities which must be balanced
 - f. all Department staff must observe the Code of Conduct for Victorian public sector employees

4. The first instance of a complaint should be directed to the school in a verbal or written form to:
 - a. the classroom teacher
 - b. the administration office
 - c. the leadership team (Principal, Assistant Principal or Team Leaders)

5. It is the responsibility of the school to respond to and address complaints from the school community by:
 - a. an acknowledgement of the complaint
 - b. an investigation of the complaint
 - c. a response (verbal or written) given to the complainant within a week (allowing for investigations to occur). If any delays occur, to update parents as to the progress of the issue.
 - d. an outcome to be resolved depending on the investigation
 - e. information given to parents if the issue cannot be resolved by the school and the options that parents have, to take their complaint further (Ref: Appendix A: Flowchart)

6. Consideration must be given to:
 - a. raising the issues in the complaint with relevant staff and/or members of the school community
 - b. consulting (where appropriate) with relevant sections of the Department (e.g. Legal Department) and/or external agencies for technical or other advice
 - c. discussing the school's findings with the parent in an attempt to reach an agreed resolution
 - d. the engagement of a mediator where the complaint has the potential to become intractable

7. Complaints about the School Principal should be directed to the Region.

Unreasonable complainant conduct

The Department (and school) considers behaviour to be unreasonable when:

- a. it is clearly and significantly outside expectations of co-operation, courtesy and respect
- b. it calls for staff resources and time unjustified by the nature or significance of the complaint
- c. an action or complaint is brought without merit, to cause annoyance to another person
- d. it is oriented towards conflict

Anonymous complaints

The Department and school requires all complaints to be considered. However, it recognises that its staff might not be able to fully consider a complaint if they cannot effectively liaise with the complainant. Furthermore, anonymous complaints raise natural justice issues for respondents who have a right to know particulars of allegations made against them.

The Department staff responsible for handling complaints should determine (in consultation with other relevant personnel from the central office or region) the extent to which an anonymous complaint received by the school, region or central office shall be investigated.

Appendix

Part A: Parent Complaint Flowchart

Evaluation

This policy will be reviewed as part of the School's three year review cycle.

PARENT COMPLAINT FLOWCHART

