



SUNBURY WEST PRIMARY SCHOOL

Addressing Parent Concerns and Complaints

DESCRIPTION:

Sunbury West Primary School is committed to promoting open communication and positive partnerships with the school community to ensure the physical, social, emotional and educational wellbeing of all students. When concerns or complaints arise, the school should always be the first point of contact.

The school's approach to handling concerns and complaints is based on our values of:

- providing a safe and supportive learning environment
- building relationships between students, parents and staff
- providing a safe working environment for staff

All parent concerns or complaints will be addressed in accordance with department policy and Victorian Privacy Laws.

PURPOSE:

The policy for addressing parent concerns and complaints provides clear procedures for communication in relation to school practice and teaching and learning programs. It also provides

- general issues of student behaviour that are contrary to the school's code of conduct
- incidents of bullying or harassment in the classroom or the school yard
- learning programs, assessment and reporting of student learning
- communication with parents
- school fees and payments
- general administrative issues
- any other school-related matters except as detailed below.

These procedures do not cover matters for which there are existing rights of review or appeal, as detailed in the *Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide*.

Those matters include:

- student discipline matters involving expulsions
- complaints about employee conduct or performance and complaints that should be dealt with by performance management, grievance resolution or disciplinary action
- complaints by the Department's employees related to their employment
- student critical incident matters
- other criminal matters.

OBJECTIVES

In addressing parent concerns and complaints, it is expected that all parties work productively towards the attainment of common goals and positive outcomes for students

When addressing parent concerns or complaints, it is expected that:

- concerns or complaints are reported promptly, as soon as possible after the issue occurs
- relevant parties provide complete and factual information about the concern or complaint
- all parties maintain and respect the privacy and confidentiality of individuals and / or groups concerned
- all parties acknowledge that a common goal is to achieve an outcome acceptable to all parties
- all parties act in good faith, and in a calm and courteous manner
- all parties show respect and understanding of each other's point of view and value difference, rather than judge and blame
- recognise that all parties have rights and responsibilities which must be balanced.
- Concerns or complaints are addressed in an efficient and timely manner

IMPLEMENTATION

Raising concerns or complaints

In the first instance, a complaint should be made to the school.

Issues can be raised by phone, letter or by making an appointment to speak to the appropriate staff member at a convenient time.

The complainant should telephone, visit or write to:

- the student's teacher or home group teacher about learning issues and incidents that happened in their class or group
- the level coordinator if students from several classes are involved
- the assistant principal about issues relating to staff members or complex student issues
- the principal about issues relating to school policy, school management, staff members or very complex student issues.

When raising a concern or complaint, it is important that the complainant

- is clear about the topic or issue they wish to discuss
- focuses on the things that genuinely affect their child
- understand that they may not have all the facts relating to the topic or issue
- considers acceptable outcomes for their child alone
- raises the issue in a timely manner

Complainants can seek the services of an advocate when they feel they are unable to express their concern clearly. An advocate can be a friend or someone who is available through an appropriate support organisation who does not receive a fee for service.

All parties involved in addressing a complaint may seek the services of a mediator when there is difficulty coming to an agreement.

The school will ensure that the complainant is aware of these supports. A complainant who wishes to use these support services should ensure the person addressing the concern or complaint is aware of their intention and is in agreement.

Managing parent concerns and complaints

The school will use appropriate systems to record and monitor complaints received, even if the complaint appears to be minor: These records will include:

- name and contact details (with permission) of the person with a concern or complaint
- the date the concern was expressed or complaint made
- the form in which the concern or complaint was received (such as face-to-face, by telephone, in writing, by email)
- a brief description of the concern or complaint
- details of the school officer responding to the concern or complaint
- action taken on the concern or complaint
- the outcome of action taken on the concern or complaint
- any recommendations for future improvement in the school's policy or procedures.

However, in the first instance, when the complaint is easily resolved in a telephone call, a brief note in the school's/principal's/teacher's diary recording the issue and the resolution may be all that is required.

Addressing parent concerns or complaints

The school will make every effort to resolve concerns and complaints before involving other levels of the Department. The school will:

- give the complainant a copy of its complaints policy.
- determine whether a concern or complaint should be managed through the school's concerns and complaints process or through other complaints processes of the Department.
- describe the process by which the school will handle the concern or complaint. For example: All complaints will be noted and acted on promptly by the staff member who receives the complaint.
- acknowledge all complaints made in writing. It will provide the complainant with a timeline for investigating the complaint.

Concerns and complaints about general school matters (such as the timing of events, school policies and facilities) will be addressed by the principal or a relevant staff member.

Where practicable, all concerns or complaints will be addressed in a timely and efficient manner with a view to resolve within one calendar month.

The school will make every attempt to resolve a concern or complaint as quickly as possible.

If your complaint involves many students and a range of issues, the school will need more time to investigate and resolve it.

The school might need to take advice from the Department's regional office which may take more time. The school will inform the complainant of the new timeline for addressing the complaint and the reasons for any delays.

Remedies

If a concern or complaint is substantiated in whole or part, the school will offer an appropriate remedy. For example, at its discretion and depending on the circumstances, the school might offer:

- an explanation or further information about the issue
- mediation, counselling or other support
- an apology, expression of regret or admission of fault
- to change its decision
- to change its policies, procedures or practices
- to cancel a debt (such as for school payments)
- a fee refund.

The school will implement the remedy as soon as practicable.

If a person with a complaint feels that the issue has not been addressed satisfactorily after speaking to the teacher and the Principal, they can then contact the Northern Metropolitan Regional Office. A Community Liaison Officer will provide them with advice and assistance.

The officer from the region will ask the complainant for a complete and factual account in writing of the concern or complaint and the complainant's opinion about why the school did not resolve it to their satisfaction.

If the complaint cannot be resolved by the complainant, school and regional office working together, the regional office may refer it to the Department's Group Coordination Division.

The Division will ask the complainant for a complete and factual account in writing of the concern or complaint and the complainant's opinion about why the school and regional office did not resolve it to their satisfaction and will ask the complainant to outline their view on the course of action required to resolve the complaint. Where the complainant is unable to provide a written account the officer from Group Coordination Division should act on the information provided.

EVALUATION

The policy for addressing parent concerns and complaints will be developed and reviewed in consultation with the school community every three years as part of the school's policy review schedule, or at any time in response to departmental policy review

Information to assist parents who want to raise a concern or make a complaint can be obtained at www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/pcschools.htm

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