



COMPLAINTS POLICY

RATIONALE

Patterson Lakes Primary School has a responsibility to ensure that high standards of conduct are maintained by staff and students at all times, and that parent concerns and complaints are managed and resolved fairly, efficiently, promptly and in accordance with relative legislation.

The school's approach to handling parent concerns and complaints is based on our vision and guiding principles being:

Vision

To provide a safe and challenging learning environment, empowering students to strive for personal excellence and become lifelong learners.

Guiding Principles

- To provide a strong, innovative educational program that personalises learning for every student.
- To embed a culture of continuous improvement focused on student achievement and school performance.
- To foster an ICT pedagogy in order to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to become effective global citizens.
- To embrace diversity within our school community where the values of Integrity, Respect and Excellence are upheld.
- To ensure a community where each child is listened to, feels safe and is valued.
- To maintain an effective partnership between staff, students, families and the local community.

POLICY OBJECTIVES

- To provide a harmonious, positive and productive school environment.
- To provide a safe and supportive learning environment for both students and teachers.
- To build and maintain constructive relationships between students, parents and staff.
- To resolve complaints fairly, efficiently, promptly and in accordance with relative legislation.

CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS COVERED BY THIS POLICY

The procedures detailed in this policy cover the following types of complaints:

- General issues relating to student behaviour, including incidents of bullying or harassment in the classroom or school grounds (Note: The school also has a separate Bullying Policy in place that is available for reference).
- Learning programs, assessment and reporting of student learning issues.
- Communication breakdowns with parents.
- School fees and payments.
- General administrative issues.
- Any other school related matters except as detailed below.

The procedures detailed in this policy do not cover matters for which there are existing rights of review or appeal, as detailed in the *DET School Policy and Advisory Guide*

(<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spaq/Pages/spaq.aspx>)

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.

OWNERSHIP AND SCOPE

The school develops its Complaints Policy in collaboration with the school community.

In addition to this policy, the school will also from time to time consider developing and/or publicising specific policies that are generating high levels of concern within the school community.

EXPECTATIONS

To assist with the resolution of a concern or complaint, the school expects a person raising a concern or complaint to:

- Raise the concern or complaint promptly, as soon as possible after the issue occurs.
- Provide complete and factual information about the concern or complaint.
- Maintain and respect the point of view, privacy and confidentiality of all parties involved.
- Acknowledge that a common goal is to achieve an outcome that is acceptable to all parties.
- Act in good faith, and in a calm and courteous manner across all communication mediums utilised in resolving the concern or complaint, including e-mail communication.
- Show respect and understanding of each other's point of view and value the different perspectives being presented, rather than applying judgement and blame.
- Recognise that all parties have rights and responsibilities, which need to be balanced during the resolution process.

The school will address any concerns and complaints received from parents:

- Courteously
- Efficiently
- Fairly
- Promptly, or within the timeline agreed with the person raising the concern or complaint.
- In accordance with due process, principles of natural justice and the Victorian Education Department's regulatory framework.

RAISING CONCERNS OR COMPLAINTS

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

The person who is raising the concern or complaint should telephone, visit or write to:

- The student's teacher about learning and incidents that have occurred in their class environment.
- The Principal or Assistant Principal about issues relating to staff members or complex student issues, and where students from several classes are involved.
- The Principal or Assistant Principal about issues relating to school policy, school management or very complex student issues.

To obtain contact details for any staff member, please call the school's phone number 9772 4011 or visit the school's website.

HELP WITH RAISING CONCERNS OR COMPLAINTS

The person raising the concern or complaint can seek the services of an advocate when they feel that they are unable to express their concern or complaint 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 concern or complaint may seek the services of a mediator when there is difficulty in reaching agreement.

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

MANAGING PARENT CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS INFORMATION

As the school takes all parent concerns and complaints seriously, the following details relating to each issue raised will be recorded, even if it appears minor:

- The name and contact details, with permission, of the person raising the concern or complaint.
- The date that 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 or by e-mail.
- A brief description of the concern or complaint.
- The outcome of action taken to address the concern or complaint.
- Any recommendations for future improvement in the schools policy or procedures.

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

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In the second instance when further attention and investigation is required, the concern or complaint will be recorded in the schools Complaints Register.

ADDRESSING CONCERNS OR COMPLAINTS

- The school will make every effort to resolve concerns and complaints involving other levels of the Department.
- The school will provide the person with the complaint or concern a copy of the Complaints Policy.
- The school will determine whether a concern or complaint should be addressed through the schools concerns and complaints process, or through the complaints processes of the Department.
- All concerns and complaints will be noted and acted on promptly by the staff member who receives the concern or complaint.
- The school will acknowledge all concerns raised and complaints made in writing. It will also provide the person raising the concern or complaint with a timeline for completing the investigation.
- The Principal or Assistant Principal will co-ordinate the investigation and resolution of all formally lodged complaints.
- Concerns and complaints about general school matters, such as timing of events, school policies and facilities. These will be addressed by the Principal, Assistant Principal or a relevant staff member.

The school will make every attempt to resolve a concern or complaint as quickly as possible. If the concern or complaint involves many students and a range of issues, the school will require more time to investigate and resolve it.

Should the complaint involve complex issues, the school might need to take advice from the Department's Regional Office, which may take additional time. The school will notify the person raising the concern or complaint of the new timeline for addressing the concern or complaint and the reason for any delays. In all cases the school will try to resolve a concern or complaint within 20 school days.

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 may 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 school payments.
- A fee refund.

The school will implement this remedy as soon as practicable.

REFERRAL OF CONCERNS OR COMPLAINTS

If a person with a concern or complaint is not satisfied with the outcome determined by the school, they can contact the School Council in the first instance, who have the ability to provide middle level support as part of their management oversight responsibilities.

If a person remains dissatisfied with the outcome determined by the school, they should contact the Department's Regional Office.

The officer from the region will ask the person raising the concern or complaint for a complete and factual account in writing, and their opinion in relation to why the school did not resolve it to their satisfaction.

If the concern or 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 the complaint 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 the Group Coordination Division should act on the information provided.

COMMUNICATION AND TRAINING

The school will make information about the policy and procedures for addressing concerns and complaints readily available to parents and the school community, in clear and easy-to-understand language and, where appropriate, in a range of community languages and formats that are accessible to everyone so that no-one is disadvantaged.

The information will include:

- How a person can raise a concern or make a complaint.
- The person's responsibilities.
- Information to be provided by the person.
- Who the person should contact and their contact details.
- The process and timeframes for managing the concern or complaint.

The school's policy and procedures for addressing concerns and complaints will be:

- Published on the school's website.
- Printed in a leaflet provided to parents when their child enrolls.
- Printed in the parents' handbook.
- Printed in the school newsletter.
- Publicised on a poster displayed in the public areas of the school.

The school will:

- Brief all members of staff, including volunteers, about its policy and procedures to address concerns and complaints on an annual basis.
- Provide staff with, or provide access to, training and support appropriate to their responsibilities under the policy and procedures.
- Ensure that staff who manage concerns and complaints demonstrate the personal attributes outlined in the *Good Practice Guide: Ombudsman Victoria's Guide to complaint handling for Victorian public sector agencies*.

MONITORING THE COMPLAINTS POLICY

The school will monitor the Complaints Policy, and consider issues raised through the concerns and complaints process, and any other relevant information from the parent opinion survey, when undertaking a review of the schools policies, procedures and operations.

The School Council will regularly review its policy and procedures to effectively address parent concerns and complaints as part of its cyclic policy and procedures review schedule.

The school will review its information about complaints made over time to:

- Identify common or recurring issues that may need to be addressed.
- Assess the effectiveness of these and other procedures and whether they are being followed.
- Use information provided to the school through the parent opinion survey on the views of parents and the school community.

EVALUATION

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

CERTIFICATION

This policy was ratified at the School Council Meeting held at Patterson Lakes Primary School, December, 2018.

Signed 
School Council President

Signed 
Principal