



# ADDRESSING CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS

## **RATIONALE**

Tarwin Valley Primary School has both a desire and a responsibility to ensure that high standards of conduct are maintained by staff, parents/carers and students at all times, and that complaints are managed and resolved fairly, efficiently, promptly and in accordance with relative legislation. This policy is designed to familiarise parents/carers with the processes our school has in place for parents/carers to raise and address concerns and complaints between the school and parents.

This policy is consistent with:

- Education and Training Reform Act 2006
- Education and Training Reform Regulations 2007
- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006
- Information Privacy Act 2000
- Wrongs Act 1958

## **AIMS**

- To provide a harmonious, safe, positive and productive school environment.
- To build respectful relationships between parents, staff and students.
- To resolve complaints fairly, efficiently, consistently, promptly and in accordance with relative legislation.

## **SCOPE**

### **Concerns and Complaints covered by the policy and procedure**

- 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

### **Ownership and Scope**

- The principal is required to use local complaints resolution procedures, where appropriate, for resolving complaints in relation to issues that fall within the school's area of responsibility. All cases of complex misconduct – sexual offences, criminal charges, or other serious incidents – must be referred to the Department of Education Conduct and Ethics Branch.
- The school will develop its procedures to address concerns and complaints in collaboration with parents and the school community.

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

- It is the principal's responsibility to provide a healthy and positive school environment that is free from discrimination and harassment. In doing so, Principal's must ensure that all staff are aware of their rights and responsibilities.
- A complainant may at any stage choose to take their complaint directly to an external agency such as the Merit Protection Boards, Australian Education Union, Victorian Equal Opportunity Commission, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission or the Ombudsman.

- Full details regarding formal complaint resolution procedures are contained within the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's 'Addressing parents' concerns and complaints effectively: Policy and guides' handbook, and contain the following steps.
- The formal process involves: -
  1. Documenting the concern or complaint
  2. Investigating the concern or complaint including formal interviews, written statements, conveying the details of the complaint to the respondent in writing providing the opportunity for a written response
  3. Resolving, addressing, dismissing or accepting the complaint. Acceptance may involve the Conduct & Ethics Branch, verbal or written warnings, conciliation, counselling or consequences etc.
  4. Preparation of a detailed confidential report
  5. Monitoring of the situation
- Parties dissatisfied with the process can appeal to the previously mentioned external agencies.
- The school will action the following process to address concerns and complaints

### **Expectations:**

It is incumbent upon the principal to act where unacceptable conduct is observed or brought to his or her attention.

Both the school and the complainant are expected to observe confidentiality, unless otherwise authorised or required to disclose information and all matters must be treated with utmost professional and mutual respect at all times.

The school expects a person raising a concern or complaint to:

- do so promptly, as soon as possible after the issue occurs
- provide complete and factual information about the concern or complaint
- maintain and respect the privacy and confidentiality of all parties
- acknowledge that a common goal is to achieve an outcome acceptable to all parties
- act in good faith, and in a calm and courteous manner
- 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

The school will address any concerns and complaints received from parents courteously, efficiently, fairly, promptly, or within the timeline agreed with the person with the concern or complaint in accordance with due process, principles of natural justice and the Department's regulatory framework.

### **Raising Concerns and Complaints**

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 principal about issues relating to staff members, school policy, school management, staff member or very complex student issues

For contact details for any staff member, call the office on (56647382)

If you are not sure who to contact, contact the Principal on (56647382).

### **Helping with Raising Concerns and Complaints**

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.

## **Managing Parents' Complaints**

The school should consider recording the following details of all complaints received, even if the complaint appears to be minor:

- 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.

The principal may choose to respond to a complaint through an informal process in cases where the complaint is minor, the complainant wishes the matter to be dealt with informally or where the complaint has arisen from lack of or unclear communication.

## **Addressing Concerns and Complaints**

- The school will make every effort to resolve concerns and complaints before involving other levels of the Department.
- The school will give a complainant a copy of its complaints procedures.
- The school will 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.
- All complaints will be noted and acted on promptly by the staff member who receives the complaint.
- The school will acknowledge all complaints made in writing. It will provide the complainant with a timeline for investigating the complaint.
- Formal processes will be used when informal processes haven't been successful, a complainant seeks a formal process, or the principal believes the complaint warrants formal investigation.
- The principal will investigate all complaints and will provide a response to the complainant.
- 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.
- The school will make every attempt to resolve a concern or complaint as quickly as possible.
- If a complaint involves many students and a range of issues, the school will need 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 more time. The school will tell the complainant the new timeline for addressing the complaint and the reasons 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.

## **Referral of Complaints**

- If a person with a concern or complaint is not satisfied with the outcome determined by the school, they should contact the Department's appropriate regional office.

- 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.

### **Communication**

The school will make information about 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 make a complaint
- the person's responsibilities
- information to be provided by the complainant
- who the person should contact and their contact details
- the process and timeframes for managing complaints

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

- printed in a leaflet given to a parent when their child enrolls
- distributed in the school newsletter at the start of each year

### **Monitoring the Policy**

- The school will monitor parent concerns and complaints and consider issues raised through the parent complaints process, and any other relevant information from the parent opinion survey, when undertaking a review of the school's 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.

### **EVALUATION**

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

Refs:

[http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/commrel/contacts/POLICY\\_AND\\_GUIDES\\_Addressing\\_parents\\_concerns.pdf](http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/commrel/contacts/POLICY_AND_GUIDES_Addressing_parents_concerns.pdf)  
[http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/hr/perform/Complaints\\_Misconduct\\_and\\_Unsatisfactory\\_Performance.pdf](http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/hr/perform/Complaints_Misconduct_and_Unsatisfactory_Performance.pdf)



# CONCERN AND COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

