Bayside Special Developmental School Raising Concerns and Complaints Policy

Aims

- For the child's school to always be your first point of contact
- An understanding that concerns are best resolved at the school
- That most complaints will be resolved by the school

The School's Values

The following values and beliefs are seen as being central to the life of our school and underpin the actions of the school community as follows:

Values

The following values are seen as being central to the life of our school. They underpin the actions of the school community and are as follows:

- Community
- Respect
- Compassion
- Team work
- Enthusiasm

Beliefs

- Personal and professional integrity
- The maintenance of high standards and a high level of professional accountability
- Consistency of approach
- Acknowledgement and appreciation of individual, cultural and community diversity
- Commitment to team work, safety, inclusiveness, confidentiality and enjoyment.
- Commitment to a philosophy of continuous improvement
- Children learn best when they are motivated or happily engaged
Concerns and Complaints Covered by the Procedures

These procedures cover concerns and complaints about:
- 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.

Ownership and Scope

This policy has been developed in collaboration with parents and key stakeholders in line with departmental policy and procedures.

Expectations

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.
The Department expects that all parties will, when addressing concerns and complaints:

- maintain the confidentiality of all parties, in line with Departmental policy and legislative requirements
- acknowledge that their 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.

Principals should ensure that parents are aware of their right to advocacy when communicating the issues involved in their complaint and in negotiating an outcome. Refer to the parent complaints website:

www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/parentcomplaint.htm

In addition to the expectations of all parties above, the Department will address complaints:

- Courteously
- Efficiently
- Fairly
- Promptly, within timelines agreed with the person with the concern or complaint (Where possible concerns or complaints should be addressed within 20 school days)
- in accordance with due process and where appropriate, the principles of natural justice and the Department’s regulatory framework.

Addressing Concerns or Complaints Procedures

- A parent can raise a concern or complaint about any aspect of a school’s operations. In the first instance, they should take a concern or make a complaint to the school.
- Any complaint raised with the regional or central office that has not been raised at the school level will be referred to the school for resolution (unless there are special circumstances which prevent the school from managing the complaint).
- 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.
- The Principal Class will investigate all written 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 Class or a relevant staff member.
• The school will make every attempt to resolve a concern or complaint as quickly as possible. If the 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.

• 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.

• 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 for school payments)
  - a fee refund.

• The school will implement the remedy as soon as practicable.

• 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’s procedures for addressing concerns and complaints will be:

• Published on the school’s website
• Printed in a leaflet given to a parent when their child enrols
• Printed in the parent’s handbook
• Available in full policy on request from the general office.
Training

The school will:
- brief all members of staff (including volunteers) about its procedures to address concerns and complaints through initially its induction process and annually through a staff briefing
- provide staff with (or provide access to) training and support appropriate to their responsibilities under the procedures
- Ensure members of staff who manage complaints demonstrate the personal attributes outlined in the Good Practice Guide: Ombudsman Victoria's guide to complaint handling for Victorian public sector agencies.

Evaluation

- 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. (every three years)

CERTIFICATION

Signed: [Signature] Date: 23/3/15
School Council President

Signed: [Signature] Date: [Signature] Date: 23/3/15
Principal

This policy ratified at School Council meeting

March 2015