



# Parent Concerns and Complaints Policy

15.11.2016

## Rationale

- The underlying premise of this policy is that parent concerns and complaints are most effectively managed at the school level.
- This policy does not apply to matters about which there are existing rights (and processes for) review and appeal, ie: matters relating to serious employee misconduct or student critical incidents.
- Feedback, whether negative or positive, is an important way for the community to provide information and response to a school.
- The school will differentiate between 'a concern' (an area of interest because of its importance and effect, which is raised informally) and 'a complaint' (an expression of grievance or resentment where the complainant is seeking redress).
- When addressing parent/guardian concerns or complaints, DET and its schools must:
  - abide by relevant regulatory and legislative frameworks
  - maintain confidentiality
  - balance the rights and responsibilities of all parties
  - ensure all parties are aware of their right to advocacy
  - seek to achieve a positive outcome, acceptable to all parties
- All concerns and complaints will be addressed in line with the DET legislative and regulatory framework, which includes the:
  - 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
  - Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (No 107 of 2004).
- Concerns and complaints will be addressed in line with the DET's 2006 *Dignity and Respect Statement*.

The Department is committed to providing safe and supportive work environments where diversity is valued and everyone is treated with respect, fairness and dignity. Discrimination, sexual and other forms of harassment, bullying, violence and threatening behaviour are unacceptable. All employees, students, parents and visitors in schools and other Departmental workplaces are expected to act accordingly. The Department (which includes schools) and school councils, will act to ensure that the safety, security, health and wellbeing of all employees, students, parents and visitors in schools and other Departmental workplaces are protected.

- A school level policy will be developed in conjunction with the school community and will be approved by School Council.
- The school will endeavour through implementation of this policy to continue to build positive relationships with parents and the school community.
- Parents will be kept informed of the school procedures in regard to making a complaint or expressing a concern in an appropriate manner in the school setting.

## **Purpose**

- To ensure the school responds to parent concerns and complaints in an effective, timely manner.
- To ensure Seabrook Primary School complies with legislative requirements as well as DET policy in relation to parent complaints and concerns.
- To ensure that Seabrook Primary School complies with legislative requirements in providing a safe work environment for its employees.
- To provide a school and working environment that is free of unwanted and unwelcome visitors or any form of harassment from such.

## **Implementation**

### **Guidelines for parents/guardians if they have a complaint or concern:**

- Parents will be encouraged to address the teacher/staff member concerned at an appropriate time ie: make an appointment. Serious issues should not be addressed at the commencement of the school day unless a prior arrangement has been made.
- Meetings/discussions are to be conducted in an appropriate place and time with due respect for privacy and confidentiality. Sensitive or contentious issues must not be discussed in the presence of students or other members of the school community.
- If a concern or complaint is raised at an inappropriate time, the teacher or staff member has the right to advise the parent that whilst he/she respects that there is a concern, the discussion is to cease and continue at an appropriate time.
- The teachers do appreciate that complaints or concerns need to be taken seriously, but that this requires their full attention, which is not possible when a teacher is teaching and supervising students.
- It is not in the best interest of students for them to witness discussions of this nature.
- It is potentially stressful for teachers to be addressed at inappropriate times about complaints or concerns when teaching and supervising students, in their workplace.
- The teacher or a member of the leadership team will make an appointment at the earliest possible mutually suitable time with the aim of reaching a satisfactory and positive resolution/outcome for both parties.
- It is in the best interest of the student for this to be achieved.
- If a satisfactory outcome is not reached after the meeting then the complaint may require implementation of the following process, whereby the complaint or concern needs to be addressed by the Principal and/or members of the Leadership Team. If both parties agree to a mediation session this will be accommodated.

## **If there is a formal concern or complaint to the Principal:**

As Seabrook Primary School wishes to prevent the complainant from having to repeat or escalate the concern or complaint, a member of the leadership team will:

- Give the complainant their name, ensuring that the complainant's name is known and used.
- Listen to the complainant carefully, with an open mind.
- Treat the complainant with respect and courtesy, consider his/her concerns respectfully, allowing him/her to feel he/she has been fairly heard.
- Make it clear the complaint will be taken seriously.
- Deal with the complaint in a proactive and empathetic manner.
- Explain procedures for resolving complaints.
- State what can be done, not what cannot be done?
- Establish if the matter is a complaint or a concern.
- Ask permission to or advise of the necessity to take notes.
- If the complaint or concern involves complex issues which are difficult to understand on first hearing, ask the complainant to put the complaint in writing.
- Investigate the matter to ensure there has been no misunderstanding or misrepresentation.
- Act in good faith, in a calm and courteous manner.
- Recognise that all parties have rights and responsibilities which must be balanced and respected.
- Consider a staff briefing if the staff member consents to discuss outcomes and future operational policy modifications
- act courteously, fairly, efficiently, promptly and in accordance with DET's policy and guidelines and the legislative framework.
- In dealing with concerns or complaints, the school will maintain the confidentiality of all parties, in line with DET policy and legislative requirements and acknowledge that the common goal is to achieve an outcome acceptable to all parties.
- The staff member and a member of the leadership team will discuss the concern to establish what has occurred.
- A meeting will be held with the Principal. Prior to the meeting with the Principal, the staff member will be given opportunity to consult with another staff member of his/her preference, possibly the Health and Safety Representative, union representative, colleague to support the conversation/act as member's advocate and if necessary attend the meeting.
- Staff AEU members are encouraged to seek advice from the Union either via a school sub-branch executive or directly to the head office.
- Ensure the staff member is aware of Employee Assistance Program (1300 361 008)
- After this investigation, a member of the Leadership Team will make an appointment with the parent.
- Ensure that the parent understands that they may wish to bring a support person to the proposed meeting.
- Staff member is to be given the option of attending the meeting with the parent should they wish to do so.
- Meeting is held with the parent, the Principal and another member of the leadership team. If the teacher concerned has chosen to attend the meeting, he/she may choose to do so with an advocate if he/she wishes. This may include a colleague or family member.

- Following the meeting with the parent, the Principal again speaks to the teacher with their support person in attendance and the Team or Learning Community leader.
- The Principal may make a mutually convenient subsequent time for a further meeting, if required.
- If after meeting, no resolution, then the matter is referred to regional personnel for advice.
- If teacher performance requires improvement or adjustment, this will need to be addressed sensitively at another time, later, in order to support the staff member and avoid additional stress on the team member.
- By, for example, development of a Professional Review Goal and/or additional PD/training to be sourced/offered.
- Review preventative actions that may be required for future operations.
- At all stages of this process, it must not be assumed that the staff member is ready to resume normal duties. Offer time out, throughout and provide time/opportunity for member to complete Edusafe log, if necessary, support by welfare officer or EAP.
- If the complaint cannot be resolved by the complainant, school and Regional Office working together, the complainant may refer the complaint to the Deputy Secretary, Office for Government School Education, as per advice provided on DETs parent complaints website. See DET General Complaints, General Information and Addressing parents' concerns and complaints effectively: policy and guides.
- The School Principal, Regional Director or General Manager, Group Coordination Division, will determine the extent to which an anonymous complaint received by the school will be investigated.

## **Evaluation**

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

When First Developed/Reviewed - DEECD School Policy Advisory Guide >  
A-Z Index: September 2014

Reference:

[www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/community/pages/parentcomplaints.aspx](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/community/pages/parentcomplaints.aspx)