



MOONEE PONDS WEST PS

ADDRESSING CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS POLICY

Purpose

Moonee Ponds West recognises that involving parents in their child's education is critical to children's development and learning. We value positive relationships with parents and families and strong school community partnerships.

The Addressing Concerns and Complaints Policy has been developed to ensure that Moonee Ponds West has procedures in place to address concerns and complaints promptly, consistently and fairly.¹

Aims

Moonee Ponds West's approach to addressing concerns and complaints is based on a commitment to:

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

Guidelines for action

Concerns and complaints covered by the policy²

The concerns and complaints covered by this policy and associated procedures include issues related to:

- General issues of student behaviour that are contrary to the school's policies including incidents of bullying and harassment
- Learning programs, assessment and reporting of student learning
- Student grouping
- Communication with parents
- School fees and payments
- General administrative issues
- 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

¹ Schools are required to establish a policy and procedures to address parents' concerns and complaints in consultation with the school community. The policy and procedures must be consistent with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) regulations.

² For the purposes of the policy: a '**concern**' is an issue of interest (because of its importance and effect) which is raised informally in order to improve or change a situation; a '**complaint**' is an expression of grievance or resentment where the complainant is seeking redress or justice.

- other criminal matters

Process for developing and reviewing the policy

The school develops its procedures to address concerns and complaints in collaboration with parents and the school community. The policy is reviewed annually by School Council.

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
- 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 or complaints

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

The complainant should telephone, visit or write to:

- the student's teacher about learning issues and incidents that happened in their class or group
- the team leader 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

Contact with members of staff can be made directly or through the school office on 9370 6875. If you are not sure who to contact, contact the Assistant Principal.

Help with raising concerns or 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 concerns and complaint information

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

Addressing 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 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 assistant 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

Timeframes

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.

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. 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.

Referral of concerns or 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 South Western Regional ((03) 9291 6500; swvr@edumail.vic.gov.au)

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 and training

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 person
- who the person should contact and their contact details
- the process and timeframes for managing complaints

Communicating complaints procedures

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 enrolls
- printed in the parent's handbook
- printed in the school newsletter periodically

The school will:

- brief all members of staff about its procedures to address concerns and complaints annually
- provide staff (and external education providers and volunteers) with training and support appropriate to their responsibilities under the procedures
- ensure that staff who manage complaints are informed of their responsibilities to demonstrate the personal attributes of the *Good Practice Guide: Ombudsman Victoria's Guide to Complaint Handling For Victorian Public Sector Agencies*

Monitoring the complaints 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.

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 addressing
- 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

Evaluation

Endorsed by School Council September 2013.

This policy is reviewed annually.

Further information

Department Policy on handling complaints:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/Pages/complainschool.aspx>

Department parent complaints website:

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

Department Dignity and Respect Statement (2006)

<http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/schacc/dignityrespectstatement.pdf>

Victorian Public Sector Complaint procedures:

www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/www./html/93-complaint-handling-uide-forthe-victorian-public-sector.asp

Victorian Teaching Profession Code of Conduct www.vit.vic.edu.au

Code of Conduct for Victorian Public Sector Employees www.ssa.vic.gov.au