



MALVERN VALLEY PRIMARY SCHOOL

RAISING CONCERNS & COMPLAINTS POLICY

GENERAL MANAGEMENT

RATIONALE:

As key stakeholders in a school community, the opportunity for parents to raise concerns and complaints are important. Most commonly these relate to:

- The management of an incident between students at a school
- The educational or other progress of their child
- The development and implementation of school and general education policy.

In all communications the school attempts to promote a healthy, safe and respectful school community. It acknowledges that concerns and complaints are best addressed when all members of the school community are working in partnership, exhibiting the responsibilities outlined in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's (DEECD) Statement of Values (Appendix 1). The school's approach to handling concerns and complaints are also based on its own values of respect, tolerance, cooperation, resilience, friendliness and confidence.

AIMS:

- To assist staff to confidently address the concerns and complaints of parents.
- To ensure a balance between the rights of all parties involved.
- To ensure parents will have a clear process to follow when raising concerns and complaints.
- To ensure parents feel confident that their concerns and complaints will be dealt with in a prompt, fair and confidential manner.

IMPLEMENTATION:

1. ADDRESSING CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS

- 1.1 A parent can raise a concern or complaint about any aspect of the school's operations including issues of student behaviour, learning programs, communication and fees and payments. Matters not covered by this policy are expulsions, employee conduct, critical incidences and criminal matters.
- 1.2 Parents should take a concern or make a complaint to the school. Any concern or 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).
- 1.3 For concerns and complaints that are not of a serious nature (such as those outlined in the above), parents should contact the relevant staff member at the earliest convenience in order to have the issue discussed and resolved immediately without proceeding through a more formal complaints process.
- 1.4 Staff will be annually briefed about the school's procedures to address concerns and complaints and provided with (or access to) training and support appropriate to their responsibilities under these procedures.
- 1.5 Upon a complaint being made, the complainant will be made aware of this policy, should they not already be.
- 1.6 The school will make every effort to resolve concerns and complaints before involving other levels of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD).

2. PROCEDURE FOR RAISING CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS

- 2.1 The complainant should set out details of the complaint, preferably in writing, and deliver to the school, where the information will be passed on to the appropriate person to deal with the complaint.
- 2.2 The school expects a person raising a complaint to do so promptly, respect the rights of all involved and acknowledge that achieving a common goal is desirable.

- 2.3 Should the Principal, Regional Director or the General Manager of the Group Coordination Division determine that a complainant's conduct is unreasonable, they can:
 - a. Develop a plan to address the complaint and the complainant's interaction with the DEECD
 - b. Inform the complainant of the plan
 - c. Ensure all Departmental officers adhere to the plan as closely as practicable.
- 2.4 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).
- 2.5 All parties involved in addressing a complaint may seek the services of a mediator when there is difficulty coming to an agreement.
- 2.6 A complainant who wishes to use these support services should ensure the person addressing the concern or complaint is aware of their intention.

3. ADDRESSING CONCERNS:

When addressing concerns, all members of staff will deal with them in the following way:

- 3.1 All concerns will be acted upon promptly by the staff member with whom they were raised.
- 3.2 The staff member will ensure the complainant is aware of, and has access to a copy of this policy upon receiving the complaint.
- 3.3 The complaint process will be documented in accordance with the below 'Managing Parent Concerns Information' section of this policy by the staff member dealing with the complaint.
- 3.4 The relevant staff member will acknowledge all concerns promptly via direct contact, email or mail. They will provide the complainant with a timeline for investigating the complaint.
- 3.5 The Principal or Assistant Principal will be made aware of the complaint and will assist the staff member throughout the investigation, response and any further action.
- 3.6 The school will make every attempt to resolve a complaint as quickly as possible. If the complaint involves many students and a range of issues, the school may need more time to investigate and resolve it. The complainant will be made aware of any adjusted timelines.
- 3.7 Should the complaint involve complex issues, the school might need to take advice from DEECD's regional office which may take more time. The school will advise the complainant of any new timeline for addressing the complaint and the reasons for any delays. In all cases, the school will try to resolve a complaint within 20 school days.

4. MANAGING PARENT CONCERNS INFORMATION:

- 4.1 Staff will ensure accurate documentation of the complaint process is promptly recorded in the school's 'Parent Concern' register on the Sentral school database.
- 4.2 Details of all concerns received will include:
 - Name and contact details of the person with a complaint
 - Student(s) involved (if relevant)
 - Details of the staff member responding to the complaint
 - The date the concern was expressed or complaint made
 - A brief description of the complaint
 - Action taken on the complaint
 - The outcome of action taken on the complaint
 - Any recommendations for future / ongoing actions to be taken

5. OUTCOMES: Complaint Resolved

- 5.1 A complaint is considered to be resolved when the complainant and school (or DEECD representative) agree on an appropriate response or remedy.
- 5.2 If a complaint is substantiated in whole or part, the school will offer an appropriate remedy in consultation with the complainant. The school will endeavour to keep the complainant up to date with progress during this process.
- 5.3 Possible responses and remedies include:
 - An explanation.
 - An acknowledgement of each other's perspective and agreement on ways to manage differences.
 - An apology or expression of regret.

- An admission of fault.
- A change of decision.
- A change of policy, procedure or practice.
- Agreement on what constitutes acceptable behaviour.
- An undertaking that unacceptable behaviour will change.
- The waiving of debt related to school fees and payments.
- A refund of parent payments.
- The provision of counselling or other support.

5.4 Remedies should be implemented as soon as possible.

6. OUTCOMES: Complaint Unresolved

- 6.1 A complaint is considered to be unresolved if the complainant does not agree on a course of action and/or a remedy, or if the remedy cannot be implemented. In such cases, a school must involve its regional office to assist in resolving the complaint.
- 6.2 If a school is unable to resolve a complaint, it can contact the regional office for support from the community liaison officer, assistant regional director or other officers as appropriate.
- 6.3 Complex complaints are those that:
- Defy resolution over a long period of time.
 - Involve complex issues (including issues involving more than one school).
 - May include complaints about the Principal of a school.
- 6.4 If a parent with a concern or complaint is not satisfied with the outcome determined by the school, they can contact the regional office. Depending on the nature and complexity of the concern or complaint, the Regional Director may involve the Assistant Regional Director, the Community Liaison Officer or other officers in the resolution of the issue.
- 6.5 Where relevant, the officer will ask the complainant for a complete and factual account in writing of the concern or complaint and the complainant's opinion about why they believe the school did not resolve the issue to their satisfaction. Where the complainant is unable to provide a written account the officer should act on the information provided verbally.
- 6.6 Regional office staff will respond promptly to complaints received and, where appropriate, immediately acknowledge, in writing, the receipt of a written complaint. They will, as far as possible, attempt to resolve the issue raised by the complainant and provide a final response within 20 school days.

REVIEW:

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

REFERENCES:

- <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/community/Pages/parentcomplaints.aspx>
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2009) *Addressing parents' concerns and complaints effectively: policy and guides*.

RATIFIED BY SCHOOL COUNCIL: 2014

TO BE REVIEWED: 2017

APPENDIX 1: Statement of Values (adopted from the DET)

STATEMENT OF VALUES

PROMOTING HEALTHY, SAFE AND RESPECTFUL SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

Malvern Valley PS recognises the importance of the partnership between schools and parents to support student learning, engagement and wellbeing. We share a commitment to, and a responsibility for, ensuring inclusive, safe and orderly environments for children and young people. This Statement of Values sets out our behavioural expectations of all members in this school community, including the principal, all school staff, parents, students and visitors. It respects the diversity of individuals in our school community and addresses the shared responsibilities of all members in building safe and respectful school communities.

Discrimination, sexual and other forms of harassment, bullying, violence, aggression and threatening behaviour are unacceptable and will not be tolerated in this school.

Our Statement of Values acknowledges that parents and school staff are strongly motivated to do their best for every child. Everyone has the right to differing opinions and views and to raise concerns, as long as we do this respectfully as a community working together.

RESPONSIBILITIES

AS PRINCIPALS AND SCHOOL LEADERS, WE WILL:

- Work collaboratively to create a school environment where respectful and safe conduct is expected of everyone.
- Behave in a manner consistent with the standards of our profession and meet core responsibilities to provide inclusive, safe and orderly environments.
- Plan, implement and monitor arrangements to ensure the care, safety, security and general wellbeing of all students in attendance at the school is protected.
- Identify and support students who are or may be at risk.
- Do our best to ensure every child achieves their personal and learning potential.
- Work with parents to understand their child's needs and, where necessary, adapt the learning environment accordingly.
- Respond appropriately when inclusive, safe or orderly behaviour is not demonstrated and implement appropriate interventions and sanctions when required.
- Make known to parents the school's communication and complaints procedures.
- Ask any person who is acting in an offensive or disorderly way to leave the school grounds.

AS TEACHERS AND ALL NON-TEACHING STAFF, WE WILL:

- Model positive behaviour to students consistent with the standards of our profession.
- Proactively engage with parents about student outcomes.
- Work with parents to understand the needs of each student and, where necessary, adapt the learning environment accordingly.
- Work collaboratively with parents to improve learning and wellbeing outcomes for students with additional needs.
- Communicate with the principal and school leaders in the event we anticipate or face any tension or challenging behaviours from parents.
- Treat all members of the school community with respect.

AS PARENTS, WE WILL:

- Model positive behaviour to our child.
- Ensure our child attends school on time, every day the school is open for instruction.
- Take an interest in our child's school and learning.
- Work with the school to achieve the best outcomes for our child.
- Communicate constructively with the school and use expected processes and protocols when raising concerns.
- Support school staff to maintain a safe learning environment for all students.
- Follow the school's complaints processes if there are complaints.

- Treat all school leaders, staff, students, and other members of the school community with respect.

AS STUDENTS, WE WILL:

- Model positive behaviour to other students.
- Comply with and model school values.
- Behave in a safe and responsible manner.
- Respect ourselves, other members of the school community and the school environment.
- Actively participate in school.
- Not disrupt the learning of others and make the most of our educational opportunities.



AS COMMUNITY MEMBERS, WE WILL:

- Model positive behaviour to the school community.
- Treat other members of the school community with respect.
- Support school staff to maintain a safe and orderly learning environment for all students.
- Utilise the school's communications policy to communicate with the school.

THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT WILL:

- Provide support and advice to principals to equip them to manage and respond to challenging behaviour of students, parents and staff.
- Provide practical guidance and resources to support schools to manage and respond to challenging behaviour of students, parents and staff.
- Provide practical guidance and resources to support schools respond to and prevent bullying and promote cyber-safety and wellbeing.
- Provide access to evidence based resources and strategies to increase student safety, wellbeing and engagement.
- Provide schools with practical and legal support as required.
- Provide parents with practical guidance and resources to resolve conflicts with the school.

CONSEQUENCES FOR FAILING TO UPHOLD THE STATEMENT OF VALUES

UNREASONABLE BEHAVIOURS

Behaviours that are considered inappropriate on and adjacent to school grounds or in relation to school business and that do not uphold the principles of this Statement of Values include when a person:

- is rude, aggressive or harasses others
- sends rude, confronting or threatening letters, emails or text messages
- is manipulative or threatening
- speaks in an aggressive tone, either in person or over the telephone
- makes sexist, racist or derogatory comments
- inappropriately uses social media as a forum to raise concerns/make complaints against the school
- is physically intimidating, e.g. standing very close.

CONSEQUENCES

Principals are responsible for determining what constitutes reasonable and unreasonable behaviour.

Unreasonable behaviour and/or failure to uphold the principles of this Statement of Values may lead to further investigation and the implementation of appropriate consequences. This may include:

- utilising mediation and counselling services
- alternative communication strategies being applied
- formal notice preventing entry onto school premises or attendance at school activities. Written notice will follow any verbal notice given.
- an intervention order being sought
- informing the police which may result in a charge of trespass or assault

By agreeing to meet specified standards of positive behaviour, everyone in our school community can be assured that they will be treated with fairness and respect. In turn, this will help to create a school that is safe and orderly, where everyone is empowered to participate and learn.