



# Portland South Primary School

## COMPLAINTS & GRIEVANCE Policy

### **PURPOSE**

Portland South Primary School has both a desire and a responsibility to ensure that high standards of conduct are maintained by staff, parents and students at all times, and that complaints are managed and resolved fairly, efficiently, promptly and in accordance with relative legislation.

Our approach to handling concerns and complaints is based on our intention:

- To provide a safe and supportive learning environment.
- To build positive and genuine relationships between students, parents and staff.
- To provide a safe working environment for all staff.
- To resolve complaints fairly, efficiently, promptly and in accordance with DET guidelines.

### **IMPLEMENTATION**

The Principal is required to use the local complaints resolution procedure, where appropriate, for resolving complaints in relation to issues that fall within our school's area of responsibility.

All cases of serious misconduct: sexual offences, criminal charges, or other serious incidents must be referred to the DET Conduct and Ethics Branch.

It is incumbent upon the Principal to act where unacceptable conduct is observed or brought to their attention.

A complainant may, at any stage, choose to take their complaint directly to an external agency such as the Victorian Institute of Teachers, Merit Protection Boards, Australian Education Union, Victorian Equal Opportunity Commission, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission or the Ombudsman.

It is important that all complaints, ensuing procedures and outcomes are fully documented.

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 the complaint has arisen from lack of or unclear communication.

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.

Full details regarding formal complaint resolution procedures are contained within the DET 'Local Complaints Resolution Procedures' handbook, and contain the following steps:

- Investigating the complaint including formal interviews, written statements, conveying the details of the complaint to the respondent in writing, providing the opportunity for a written response.
- Dismissing or accepting the complaint. Acceptance may involve the Complaints & Investigations Unit, verbal or written warnings, conciliation, or counselling etc.
- Preparation of a detailed confidential report.
- Monitoring of the situation.

Parties dissatisfied with the process can appeal to the previously mentioned external agencies.

All matters must be treated with utmost confidentiality, and professional respect at all times.

Our school Council President may be informed of complaints at the discretion of the principal and, within the guidelines of DET Policy.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **Our 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:

- 1) How a person can make a complaint.
- 2) The person's responsibilities.
- 3) Information to be provided by the person.
- 4) Who the person should contact and their contact details.
- 5) The process and timeframes for managing complaints.

Brief all members of staff (including volunteers) about its procedures to address concerns and complaints as necessary.

Provide staff with (or provide access to) training and support appropriate to their responsibilities under the procedures.

Ensure 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).

Our 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 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.

Portland South Primary School Complaints Policy will be reviewed as per School Council Policy and School Council will evaluate its relevance in line with DET guidelines and community expectations as represented by parent members on School Council.

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.

## **REFERENCES**

DET: Addressing parents' concerns and complaints effectively: policy and guides

## **Appendix A**

### **Raising Concerns & Complaints Procedures**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

It is the Principal's responsibility to provide a healthy and positive school environment that is free from discrimination and harassment. In doing so, the Principal will ensure that all staff, students and community members are aware of their rights and responsibilities.

#### **Concerns & Complaints that are covered in these procedures**

- General issues of student behaviour that are contrary to our school's code of conduct.
- Incidents of bullying, cyberbullying or harassment in the classroom or our schoolyard.
- 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.

#### **Concerns & Complaint that are not covered in these procedures**

The following matters are not covered for which there are existing rights of review or appeal, as detailed in the Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide.

- Student discipline matters involving expulsions.
- Complaints about employee conduct or performance and complaint 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.

#### **EXPECTATIONS**

##### **Of Parent/Carer**

Our 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.

### **Of the school**

Our school will address any concerns and complaints received from parents:

- Courteously, efficiently and 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.

### **MAKING THE CONCERN OR COMPLAINT**

1) In the first instance the concern or complaint should be made to the school by telephone, visit or writing to:

- The student's teacher about learning issues and incidents that happened in their class or group.
- The Principal about issues relating to staff members or complex student issues.
- The Principal about issues relating to school policy or school management.
- For contact details for any staff member or Principal, call the office on (03) 55232911

2) 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.

- Our school will ensure that the complainant is aware of these supports. A complainant who wishes to use these support services should ensure the person addressing the concern or complaint is aware of their intention and is in agreement.

3) Our 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 our school's policy or procedures.

However, in the first instance, when the complaint is easily resolved in a telephone call, a brief note in our school's/principal's/teacher's diary recording the issue and the resolution may be all that is required.

### **ADDRESSING CONCERNS & COMPLAINTS**

- Our school will make every effort to resolve concerns and complaints before involving other levels of the Department.
- Our school will give a complainant a copy of its Concerns & Complaints procedures.
- Our school will determine whether a concern or complaint should be managed through our 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.
- Our school will acknowledge all complaints made in writing. It will provide the complainant with a timeline for investigating the complaint.

- 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.
- Our 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, our school will need more time to investigate and resolve it.
- Should the complaint involve complex issues, our school might need to take advice from the Department's Regional Office which may take more time. Our school will inform the complainant of the new timeline for addressing the complaint and the reasons for any delays. In all cases, our school will try to resolve a concern or complaint within 20 school days.

### **RESOLUTION**

If a concern or complaint is substantiated in whole or part, our school will offer an appropriate resolution.

For example, at its discretion and depending on the circumstances, our 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.

Our school will implement the resolution as soon as practicable.

### **IF COMPLAINT NOT RESOLVED**

If a person with a concern or complaint is not satisfied with the outcome determined by our 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 our 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 our 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

### **REVIEW CYCLE AND EVALUATION**

This policy is scheduled for review in 2024.

This policy was last tabled at School Council in March, 2020