



Addressing Concerns and Complaints Policy

1. BACKGROUND

Williamstown Primary School recognises and values positive partnerships between families and the school. This is critical to achieving the most successful outcomes in learning and development for our students.

2. PURPOSE

Feedback and information from families is an essential component of the school improvement process. Such feedback can be either an opportunity for celebration or an opportunity for evaluation and improvement. This policy has been developed to ensure that Williamstown Primary School has procedures in place to address concerns and complaints with the view to evaluating school processes, practices and procedures. This policy will ensure concerns and complaints will be addressed promptly, consistently and fairly, in line with DET policy.

The underlying premise of the policy is that parent concerns and complaints are best managed at the school level. This policy therefore applies to all school-related matters such as general issues around student wellbeing and behaviour, learning programs assessment and reporting of student learning, student groupings, communication with parents, administrative issues. The policy does not apply to matters about which there are existing rights (and processes for) review and appeal, such as matters relating to serious employee misconduct, student critical incidents and criminal activities.

3. DEFINITIONS

"School" means Williamstown Primary School.

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 a complainant is seeking redress or justice.

4. PROCEDURES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- 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 or justice).
- Concerns and complaints will be addressed in line with the DET's 2006 *Dignity and Respect Statement*. The statement says that:
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.
- Parents will be made aware of the official procedures for providing feedback, making formal complaints or raising concerns.
- Williamstown Primary School's approach to addressing concerns and complaints is based on a commitment to:
 - Ensuring respectful relationships are built and maintained between all parties
 - Providing a safe and supportive learning environment
 - Providing a safe working environment for staff
 - Building relationships between students, parents and staff
- In the first instance, the complaint should be made directly to the school.
The complainant should visit or telephone:
 - The student's teacher about learning issues and incidents that happened in the student's class or group;
 - The team leader / leading teacher may also be contacted if students from several classes are involved or the complainant believes a further response is required;

- A member of the Principal team about issues relating to staff members or complex student issues, or if other action has been explored and a further response is deemed suitable;
- The principal about issues relating to school policy, school management, staff members or very complex student issues.
- If parents are unsure about whom to contact, advice should be sought from a principal team member.
- Some issues are extremely confidential in nature. Therefore:
 - The school strongly discourages parents contacting other parents to discuss an issue or concern. The school should be the first point of contact;
 - Under no circumstances should parents or family members speak directly to another student / students if they have a complaint.
- If a parent complaint or concern is of a more serious nature, the staff member in receipt of the complaint or concern should immediately notify a Principal class member.
- When addressing parent/guardian concerns or complaints, all parties (staff and families) will:
 - Maintain the confidentiality of all parties,
 - 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
 - Balance the rights and responsibilities of all parties
 - Ensure all parties are aware of their right to advocacy. An advocate can be a friend or someone who is available through an appropriate support organisation that does not receive a fee for service.
 - Act courteously, fairly, efficiently, promptly or within a timeline agreed with the complainant and in accordance DET's policy and regulatory legislative framework
- As Williamstown Primary School wishes to prevent the complainant from having to repeat the complaint over and over, the first staff member the person deals with will:
 - Listen to the complainant carefully and with an open mind
 - Treat them with respect and courtesy, take them seriously and let them have their say
 - Make it clear that the complaint will be taken seriously
 - Explain the procedures for resolving complaints
 - State what can be done, not what cannot be done
 - Ask the complainant if the matter is a complaint or a concern
 - Take notes
 - If the complaint involves complex issues which are difficult to understand on first hearing, ask the complainant to put the complaint in writing
 - Immediately forward any complaint recorded in writing (by letter or email) to the Principal.
 - Check the facts to make sure they are clear and beyond doubt
 - Make a mutually convenient time to meet, if a further meeting is required
 - Give the complainant their name and ensure the complainant's name is known and used.
- If, after speaking to staff at the school, the parent feels the complaint has not been addressed satisfactorily, the parent should contact the Principal.
- If after speaking to the Principal the parent feels the complaint has not been addressed satisfactorily, he/she can direct the matter to the regional office. Schools are obliged to assist the complainant to make this contact.
- 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 DET's parent complaints website. A form for this purpose is available.
- 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.
- All concerns and complaints will be addressed in line with the DET's 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.*
- Additionally, schools enrolling international students are required to maintain an international student's enrolment (to comply with student visa conditions) and appropriate student welfare support arrangements until the relevant complaints or appeals process is resolved.
- Reference:
 - www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/community/pages/parentcomplaints.aspx

5. REVIEW AND POLICY HISTORY

This policy is due for formal review in May 2018 although it may be changed at any time as required after discussion with School Council and the Principal or if guidelines change (latest DET update mid April 2015).

Policy History

Version Approval Date	Summary of Changes
May 2016	New Policy