

CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS POLICY

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to:

- provide an outline of the complaints process at Seaholme Primary School so that parents and members of the community are informed of how they can raise complaints or concerns about issues arising at our school in a productive manner.
- ensure that all complaints regarding Seaholme Primary School are managed in a timely, effective, fair and respectful manner, and promptly and in accordance with relative legislation.

Our 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 goal is to provide a harmonious, positive and productive school environment.

SCOPE

This policy relates to complaints brought by parents, carers, students or members of our school community and applies to all matters relating to our school. In some limited instances, we may need to refer the complainant to another Department of Education and Training (DET) process where there are different mechanisms in place to review certain decisions, for example, expulsion appeals.

Concerns and Complaints Covered by the Policy:

- General issues of student behaviour that are contrary to the school's code of conduct
- Incidents of bullying or harassment in the classroom or the school yard
- 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 those detailed below.

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

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 at Seaholme Primary School are aware of their rights and responsibilities.

The principal is required to use local complaints resolution procedures, where appropriate, for resolving complaints in relation to issues that fall within the school's area of responsibility. All cases of serious misconduct – sexual offences, criminal charges, or other serious incidents – must instead be referred to the DET Conduct and Ethics Branch.

Teachers will also be provided with the complaints resolution guidelines to enable them to provide consistency when dealing with complaints. It is incumbent upon the principal to act where unacceptable conduct is observed or brought to his or her 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.

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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 in writing;
- 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.

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

- Courteously, efficiently and fairly
- Promptly, or within a timeline agreed with the complaint
- In accordance with due process, principles of natural justice and the Department's regulatory framework

Raising Concerns and Complaints:

In the first instance, a complaint should be made to the school. Every effort will be made to resolve the complaint at the school level. Mediation is encouraged if a situation presents where resolution proves difficult. DET also supports resolution of complaints at school level.

The complainant should telephone, visit or write to:

- The student's teacher/s or home group teacher upon learning of the issues and incidents that happened in their class group
- The principal about issues relating to school policy, school management, staff members or very complex student issues
- School Council members about general concerns. Complaints can be made to Council members in person or via email: seaholme.ps@edumail.vic.gov.au
- The office on (03) 9398 2806 and they will be directed to the appropriate person.

Managing Parent Concerns and Complaints Information:

The following details of all complaints received, even if the complaint appears to be minor will be recorded:

- 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 or 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 the action taken on the concern or complaint;
- Any recommendations for future improvement in the school policies or procedures;
- However, in the first instance, when the complaint is easily resolved in a telephone call, a brief note in the school Principal /teacher's diary recording the issue and the resolution may be all that is required.

Concerns and complaints about general school matters such as timing of events, school policies and facilities will be addressed by the principal or a relevant staff member. The school will make every attempt to resolve a concern or complaint as quickly as possible.

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Should the complaint involve complex issues, the school might need to take advice from the 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.

Resolution:

If a concern or complaint is substantial in whole or part, the school and the complainant will agree on an appropriate outcome. Where appropriate, depending on the circumstances, Seaholme Primary School may seek to resolve a complaint by:

- 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);

In some circumstances, Seaholme Primary School may also ask you to attend a meeting with an independent third party or participate in a mediation with an accredited mediator to assist in the resolution of the dispute.

The school will implement the agreed resolution as soon as practicable.

Referral of Concerns or Complaints:

If all avenues to resolve the concern or complaint have been exhausted and the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome determined by the school, they should contact DET. For more information about the Department's *Parent Complaints* policy, including the role of the Regional Office, please see: [Parent complaints policy](#).

If you are not satisfied that your complaint has been resolved by the school, or if your complaint is about the principal and you do not want to raise it directly with them, then the complaint should be referred to the South Western Victorian Region by contacting, Email: swvr@edumail.vic.gov.au or Phone: 1300 333 232

Seaholme Primary School may also refer a complaint to South Western Victorian Region if we believe that we have done all we can to address the complaint.

If the complaint cannot be resolved by the complainant, school and region working together, the regional office may refer it to the **Independent Office for School Dispute Resolution**. They 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 actions required to resolve the complaint. For further information please call: 1300 017 593 or email school.resolution@edumail.vic.gov.au

Communication and Training

The school will make the information about procedures for addressing concerns and complaints readily available to parents and the school community, in clear and easy to understand language. The information will include:

- How a person can make a complaint
- Their personal responsibilities
- Information to be provided by the person
- Who the person should contact and their contact details

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The Process and Time Frame for Managing Complaints

The policy and procedure for addressing concerns and complaints will be published on the school's website.

The school will:

- Annually brief all members of staff (including volunteers) about its procedures to address concerns and complaints
- Provide staff with (or provide access to) training and support appropriate to their responsibilities under the procedures

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.

Note:

- 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
- The School Council president will be kept informed of all complaints.

Monitoring Complaints

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.

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;
- Help to interpret information provided to the school through the parent opinion survey on the views of parents.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

Related School Policies

- Bullying and Harassment Policy
- Digital Technologies Acceptable Use Policy
- Homework Policy
- Student Engagement and Wellbeing Policy
- Code of Conduct
- Supervision and Duty of Care Policy

Related DET Resources

For more information about the Department's *Parent Complaints* policy, including the role of the Regional Office, please see: [Parent complaints policy](#).

Related Legislation:

- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006
- Education and Training Reform Act 2006
- Education and Training Reform Regulations 2007
- Information Privacy Act 2000
- Wrongs Act 1958

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EVALUATION AND REVIEW

The school will monitor the Concerns and Complaints Policy when undertaking a review of the school policies, procedures and operations as part of the school improvement cycle, and/or in the event of any legal, school or family requirements issuing from a complaint