

Complaints Policy

Complaints are best addressed in an environment where parent/guardians and members of the community feel able to speak up about issues concerning the education and welfare of their children/children in their care or other issues arising at our school.

Rationale

Oakwood School values are:

- **Learning**
- **Respect**
- **Empowerment**

These values provide the framework, within which high standards of conduct are maintained with staff, parents and students. Within this framework it is the school's desire and responsibility to manage and resolve complaints fairly, efficiently and properly and in accordance with relevant legislation.

Aim

Our values are demonstrated by:

- providing a supportive school culture and environment.
- building positive relationships between students, parents and staff.
- providing a safe working environment for staff
- promoting the home-school partnership

Implementation

Our school seeks to provide a positive, harmonious and co-operative environment with realistic expectations of what can be achieved by the school. Our environment supports, open, two-way communication, free of blame that will assist the school to handle concerns or complaints being raised by parent or guardian, students or members of our community.

Concerns and Complaints

These procedures cover concerns and complaints about:

- general issues of student behavior that are contrary to the school's student engagement policy including incidents of bullying or harassment
- learning programs, assessment and reporting of student learning
- communication with parents
- school fees and payments
- general administrative issues
- any other school related matter

Raising concerns or complaints

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 Campus Principal if students from several classes are involved
- the Principal about issues relating to school policy, school management, staff members or very complex student issues.

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 might be a member of School Council 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 a difficulty coming to an agreement.

The 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.

Managing concerns and complaints information

It is important that all complaints, ensuing procedures and outcomes are fully documented as below:

- name and contact details (with permission) of the person with a concern or complaint
- the date the concern was expressed or complaint made
- 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.
- a complaint register will be held in the Principal's Office for parent concerns or complaints made at that level.

Addressing concerns or complaints

All the concerns or complaints will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and professional respect at all times.

The school will make every effort to resolve concerns and complaints before involving other levels of the department. However, should the complaint involve complex issues, the school might need to take advice from the Department's Regional Office. This may take more time. Therefore the school will tell the complainant the new timeline for addressing the complaint and the reason for any delays. In all cases the school will try to resolve the concern or complaint promptly. If the complaint involves many students and a range of issues the school will need more time to investigate and resolve it.

Concerns or complaints about general classroom matters should be referred to the relevant classroom teacher or relevant Campus Principal. Concerns and complaints about general school matters, including policies, facilities, staff and unresolved matters previously dealt with at a classroom level should be referred to the Principal.

The Principal will determine whether a concern or complaint should be managed through the school's Complaints Procedure or through other complaint processes of the Department. All complaints will be acted on promptly by the staff member who receives the complaint.

The school will acknowledge all complaints made and provide the complainant with a timeline for investigating the complaint.

Where a complaint is referred to the Principal 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 a lack understanding 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.

The Formal Process involves

1. Investigating the complaint through formal interviews, written statements, conveying the details of the complaint to the respondent in writing and providing the opportunity for a written response.
2. Dismissing or accepting the complaint. Acceptance may involve a range of appropriate outcomes offered at the school's discretion as listed further in this document.
3. Preparation of a detailed confidential report.
4. Monitoring of the situation.

Outcomes

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

Following receipt of complaint, the regional director (or delegate) will:

- Acknowledge receipt of a written complaint as soon as possible, ensuring the person is aware of the complaint-handling procedures the region may use to respond to the complaint.
- Assess the complaint, which can result in the region undertaking one or more of the following processes to help resolve it:
 - Allow more time for resolution at the school
 - Provide assistance to reach a resolution through regional support
 - Undertake a regional review
 - Arrange for an independent investigation

If the complaint cannot be resolved by the complainant, school and regional office working together, the regional office may seek specialist or technical advice from external agencies and/or the Departments to determine how a complaint should be reviewed.

The complainant should also be advised they are able to take the matter to the Deputy Secretary, Regional Services, Group, if they believe a fair and just process has not been followed to address the complaints by the school or the region.

Communication and training

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

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.

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
- publicised on a poster displayed in public areas of the school.

Training and support

The school will:

- Ensure all school personnel are aware of the school's complaint-handling procedures and provide opportunities for staff to attend training/professional development activities with a focus on complaint management.

Monitoring the complaints policy

The school will monitor parent concerns and complaints and consider issues raised through the 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 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.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the website for parents outlining the Department's complaint process. This includes advice on how to raise concerns.

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/Principals/spag/community/Pages/parentcomplaints.aspx>

This policy was reviewed in May 2018.