



## HIGHVALE PRIMARY SCHOOL

# Concerns and Complaints Policy and Procedure

**Ratified by School Council: November 2013**

**Review date: November 2016**

### **Purpose:**

The purpose of this policy and procedures document is to ensure that there are clear guidelines to enable parents to raise concerns and complaints at the school level.

### **School Values:**

The school's approach to handling concerns and complaints is based on our values of:

- |                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| Respect               | - Consider others, their property and the environment |
| Responsibility        | - Be reliable, resourceful and own your actions       |
| Honesty and Integrity | - Be fair and trustworthy                             |
| Commitment            | - Persist, give your best and bounce back             |

### **Concerns and Complaints Covered by the Procedure:**

These procedures cover concerns and complaints about:

- General issues of student behaviour that are contrary to the HPS Student Engagement and Inclusion Policy
- 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

These procedures do not cover matters for which there are existing rights of review or appeal, as detailed in the *Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide*.

Those matters include:

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

### **Ownership and Scope:**

This policy and procedure document to address concerns and complaints has been developed in collaboration with parents and the school community.

### **Expectations:**

The school expects a person raising a concern or complaint to:

- Notify the school as soon as possible after the incident 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

**Respect**

**Responsibility**

**Honesty and Integrity**

**Commitment**

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

- Courteously
- Efficiently
- Fairly
- In a timely manner

**Raising Concerns and Complaints:**

In the first instance, a complaint should be made to the school.

The complainant should telephone, visit or write to:

- The student's teacher or home group teacher about learning issues and incidents that happened in their class or group
- The year level coordinator if students from several classes are involved
- The assistant principal about issues relating to staff members or complex student issues
- The principal about issues relating to school policy, school management, staff members, general concerns or very complex student issues

For contact details for any staff member, call the office on 98878000. If you are not sure who to contact, contact the Assistant Principal on 98878000 and you will be directed to the appropriate person.

Every effort will be made to resolve the complaint at the school level. DEECD also supports resolution of complaints at school level. DEECD information for parents on raising concerns and complaints can be found here <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/pcschools.htm>

**Help with Raising Concerns or Complaints:**

Personal support is most appropriate in situations where the complainant and others involved in the complaint process have emotional issues related to the complaint.

Complainants can seek the services of a support person when they feel they are unable to express their concern clearly.

All parties involved in addressing a complaint may seek the services of a mediator when there is difficulty coming to an agreement. All complainants are to be made aware of these supports. A complainant who wishes to use a support service should ensure the person addressing the concern or complaint is aware of their intention and is in agreement.

Appropriate support organisations include the *Dispute Settlement Centre Victoria* <http://www.disputes.vic.gov.au>. Services provided by this organisation are free and confidential.

**Managing Parent Concerns and Complaints Information:**

Please note that the school community strongly encourages parents raising concerns and complaints to give their name and contact details when making a complaint. Anonymous complaints are difficult to fully investigate, and also raise natural justice issues. Respondents have a right to know the particulars of the allegations made against them.

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

The following details of other complaints received will be recorded:

- Name and contact details (with permission) of the person with a concern or complaint
- Details of the school officer responding to the 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
- **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

**Addressing Concerns or Complaints:**

In addressing concerns the school will:

- Give a complainant a copy of its complaints procedures where appropriate
- Note and act upon the complaint according to School and DEECD policy
- Acknowledge and provide a timeline for investigating a complaint which is made in writing and complies with School expectations of a person raising a concern or complaint
- Determine whether a concern or complaint should be managed through the school's concerns and complaints process or through other complaints processes of the Department
- Make every effort to resolve concerns and complaints before involving other levels of the Department

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.

Complaints and concerns received in good faith will be noted by the receiving staff member. It will then be investigated and the 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, the school will need more time to investigate and resolve it
- Should the complaint involve complex issues, the school might need to take advice from the Department's 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

If a concern or complaint is substantiated in whole or part, the school and the complainant will agree on an appropriate outcome. For example, 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 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 DEECD's Regional Community Liaison Officer on 9265 2453.

The officer from Eastern 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 the 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 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 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.

#### **Communication and Training:**

The school will make this 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:

- 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

This policy and procedure for addressing concerns and complaints will be:

- Published on the school's website
- Available in hard copy from the school office upon request

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

**Monitoring the Parent Complaints Policy:**

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 and other surveys 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 and other surveys on the views of parents

**Responsibility and Evaluation:**

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.