



## BLACKBURN PRIMARY SCHOOL PARENT CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS POLICY & GUIDELINES

### RATIONALE

Blackburn Primary School has a policy and procedures for dealing with parent concerns and complaints. It is recognised that parent concerns and complaints mostly relate to one of the following areas:

- the management of an incident between students at the school;
- the management of an incident or situation involving staff;
- the educational (or other) progress of a student; or
- the development and implementation of school policy.

### GUIDELINES

Blackburn Primary School's values of Responsibility, Co-operation, Celebrate Diversity, Manners and Respect, Fairness and Honesty and Friendship underpin interactions with and between members of the school community. Additionally, the school addresses parent concerns or complaints within a context of:

- providing a safe and supportive learning environment for all our students;
- providing a safe working environment for staff; and
- building positive relationships between all stakeholders: students, parents, staff and the wider community.

For the purposes of this policy:

- 'Parent' – refers to a guardian or person who has parental responsibility for the child including parental responsibility under the Family Law Act 1975 of the Commonwealth and any person with whom a child normally or regularly resides;
- 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 the complainant is seeking redress or justice.

### PROCEDURES

The following procedures cover concerns and complaints relating to:

- general issues of student misbehaviour that are contrary to the school's code of conduct
- incidents of bullying or harassment in the classroom or school yard
- learning programs, assessment and reporting of student learning
- communication with parents and carers
- school fees and payments
- general administrative issues.

The procedures **do not cover** concerns and issues related to:

- student discipline involving expulsions
- complaints about employee conduct or performance ( as these should be dealt with by performance management, grievance resolution or disciplinary action)
- complaints by employees relating their employment
- student critical incident matters
- criminal matters.

Additionally:

- This policy does not apply to matters for which there are existing rights of, and processes for, review or appeal. If at any stage it becomes apparent that the concern or complaint relates to such matters, the relevant procedures should be implemented immediately.
- This policy is not applicable where a complainant has employed another party to represent them, such as a solicitor. In these circumstances the concern or complaint should be referred to the Department's Legal Services Branch for their assessment.

### **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
- 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 in a calm and courteous manner
- show respect and understanding of each other's point of view and value differences, rather than to judge and blame
- recognise that all parties have rights and responsibilities which must be balanced.

In accordance with our school values, the school will address any concerns or complaints received by parents in the following manner:

- courteously
- efficiently
- fairly
- as promptly as possible
- in accordance with due process, principles of natural justice and the DET regulatory framework.

### **How to raise a concern or complaint:**

In the first instance, a concern or complaint should be made directly to the school. The complainant should telephone, write to or visit:

- the student's classroom teacher about learning or behaviour issues, or issues in their classroom or playground concerning a child or children in their class;
- the level leader if students from several classes are involved;
- the school's staff leadership team about issues relating to complex student issues; or
- the principal about issues relating to staff members, school policy, school management, or more complex student issues.

If parents are unsure of whom to contact, please contact the principal, who will provide advice as to the most suitable staff member to handle the concern or complaint.

### **Support available when raising a concern:**

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 organisation and does not receive a fee or have a legal interest in the outcome or process.

All parties involved in addressing a complaint may seek the services of a mediator when there is difficulty coming to an agreement.

### **Managing and addressing complaints and concerns:**

The school will record the following details of all complaints received:

- the name and contact details (with permission) of the person making a complaint/raising a concern
- the date the concern was expressed

- the form in which the concern was received (e.g. face to face, letter, telephone, email)
- a brief description of the complaint
- the details of the school's response
- the action taken relating to the concern /complaint
- any recommendations for the future.

However, when the complaint is easily resolved in a telephone call, briefer notes will be kept.

The school will determine whether a concern or complaint should be managed through the school's concerns and complaints process or through other complaints processes of DET. The school will make every effort to resolve concerns and complaints before involving other levels of DET.

All reasonable efforts will be made to resolve a concern or complaint as quickly as possible. The school will attempt to resolve a concern or complaint within twenty working days. However, the nature of a complaint can affect the time frame needed. The school should not compromise the opportunity to fully investigate and resolve the complaint due to time pressure.

Should the complaint involve complex issues, the school may need to take advice from the DET regional office, which may require additional time.

#### **Remedies:**

If a concern or complaint is substantiated in part or whole, the school will offer an appropriate remedy. This may include one of the following:

- an explanation or further information about the issue
- mediation, counselling or other support
- an apology, expression of regret or admission of fault
- a change of decision
- a change of policy, procedure or practice
- the cancellation of a debt or a refund.

#### **Referral of complaints or concerns:**

If a person with a concern or complaint is not satisfied with the outcome determined by the school, they should contact the North Eastern Victoria Regional Office.

The officer from the regional office will ask the complainant for a complete 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 DET Group Coordination Division (via the Department Secretary, Office for Government School Education).

The Division will ask the complainant for a complete and factual account of the concern and request the complainant's opinion as to why the issue was not resolved and their course of action on how the issue can be resolved.

#### **Unreasonable complainant conduct:**

In some situations, the school may determine there is unreasonable complainant conduct. This is behaviour that:

- is clearly and significantly outside the expectations of confidentiality, cooperation, courtesy and respect;
- calls for staff resources and time unjustified by the nature or significance of the complaint;

- is vexatious (that is, an action or complaint that is brought without merit, often to cause annoyance to another person); or
- is oriented towards conflict.

The school principal, regional director or the general manager, Group Coordination Division can determine if a complainant's conduct is unreasonable. If so determined, further action can be initiated.

**Communication:**

The school will make information about procedures for addressing concerns and complaints available to parents and the school community. This policy and procedures will be:

- included with the enrolment package handed to all new arrivals at the school;
- published on the school website; and
- available from the school office.

**Training and Support for staff:**

The school will:

- brief all staff members about its procedures to address complaints and concerns
- provide staff with training and support appropriate to their responsibilities under the procedures.

**Links:**

Links which are connected with this policy are:

- DET's [Parent Complaints - Government Schools](#)
- [Addressing parents' concerns and complaints effectively: policy and guides](#)

**RATIFIED BY SCHOOL COUNCIL**

**DATE: October 2016**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Version Number:</b>	<b>Update information</b>	<b>Next Review:</b>
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October 2016	2.0	Periodic update, department name change and addition of relevant links	October 2018