



Northern School for Autism

"Learning for Life"

COMPLAINTS, PARENTS POLICY

PURPOSE

The information provided in this policy and the associated resource material is intended to support school-based staff at Northern School for Autism to act consistently with the overarching Department Parent Complaint Policy and to extract the key information specific to schools.

SCOPE

This policy sets out the requirements for schools with respect to management of parent complaints based on the Department's Parent Complaint Policy. It also outlines the Department's complaints framework and the various supports available to school staff when responding to parent concerns and complaints.

This policy is intended for School Leadership, staff and parents/carers.

POLICY

This school welcomes feedback, both positive and negative, and is committed to continuous improvement. We value open communication with our families and are committed to understanding complaints and addressing them appropriately. We recognise that the complaints process provides an important opportunity for reflection and learning.

We value and encourage open and positive relationships with our school community. We understand that it is in the best interests of students for there to be a trusting relationship between families and our school.

The school will treat concerns seriously and welcome opportunities raised through complaints to change or improve practices and learning opportunities for students.

When addressing a complaint, it is expected that all parties will:

- be considerate of each other's views and respect each other's role
- be focused on resolution of the complaint, with the interests of the student involved at the centre
- act in good faith and cooperation
- behave with respect and courtesy
- respect the privacy and confidentiality of those involved, as appropriate
- operate within and seek reasonable resolutions that comply with any applicable legislation and Department policy

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- recognise that schools and the Department may be subject to legal constraints on their ability to act or disclose information in some circumstances.

Preparation for Raising a Concern or Complaint

The school encourages parents, carers or members of the community who may wish to submit a complaint to:

- carefully consider the issues you would like to discuss
- remember you may not have all the facts relating to the issues that you want to raise
- think about how the matter could be resolved
- be informed by checking the policies and guidelines set by the Department and the school (please see "Further Information and Resources" section below)

Complaints Process

The school is always happy to discuss with parents/carers and community members any concerns that they may have. Concerns in the first instance should be directed to your child's teacher, Year Level Coordinator, Assistant Principal or Principal. Where possible, school staff will work with you to ensure that your concerns are appropriately addressed.

Where concerns cannot be resolved in this way, parents/carers or community members may wish to make a formal complaint to the Principal or member of the school's leadership team].

If you would like to make a formal complaint, in most cases, depending on the nature of the complaint raised, our school will first seek to understand the issues and will then convene a resolution meeting with the aim of resolving the complaint together. The following process will apply:

1. **Complaint Received:** Please either email, telephone or arrange a meeting through the front office with the Principal or Assistant Principal] to outline your complaint so that we can fully understand what the issues are. We can discuss your complaint in a way that is convenient for you, whether in writing, in person or over the phone.
2. **Information Gathering:** Depending on the issues raised in the complaint, the Principal, Assistant Principal or nominee may need to gather further information to properly understand the situation. This process may also involve speaking to others to obtain details about the situation or the concerns raised.
3. **Response:** Where possible, a resolution meeting will be arranged with the Principal/Assistant Principal] to discuss the complaint with the objective of reaching a resolution satisfactory to all parties. If after the resolution meeting we are unable to resolve the complaint together, we will work with you to produce a written summary of the complaint in the event you would like to take further

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action about it. In some circumstances, the Principal may determine that a resolution meeting would not be appropriate. In this situation, a response to the complaint will be provided in writing.

4. **Timelines:** The school will acknowledge receipt of your complaint as soon as possible (usually within two school days) and will seek to resolve complaints in a timely manner. Depending on the complexity of the complaint, the school may need some time to gather enough information to fully understand the circumstances of your complaint. We will endeavour to complete any necessary information gathering and hold a resolution meeting where appropriate within 10 working days of the complaint being raised. In situations where further time is required, we will consult with you and discuss any interim solutions to the dispute that can be put in place.

[Note: The Department's Parent Complaint Policy requires schools to keep a written record of serious, substantial or unusual complaints that require resolution actions and document all steps taken to achieve agreement].

Resolution

Where appropriate, the school may seek to resolve a complaint by:

- an apology or expression of regret
- a change of decision
- a change of policy, procedure or practice
- offering the opportunity for student counselling or other support
- other actions consistent with school values that are intended to support the student, parent and school relationship, engagement, and participation in the school community.

In some circumstances, the 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.

Escalation

If a parent/carer or community member is not satisfied that their complaint has been resolved by the school, or if their complaint is about the Principal, then the complaint should be referred to the regional office.

The school may also refer a complaint to the regional office if we believe that we have done all we can to address the complaint.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

The following resources are available to support schools to manage complaints:

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For a guide on managing conflict in schools, and information on mediation and facilitated discussion services, refer to [Conflict resolution in schools](#) (login required).

A [Complaints Policy](#) and [Parent Dispute Policy](#) template is available in the [School Policy Templates Portal](#) (login required).

The [Employee Conduct Branch](#) can provide the Principals with advice and support in addressing allegations about employee conduct or work performance.

The Legal Division can provide the Principal with advice and support in addressing allegations with legal elements or risks by phone on 9637 3146 and email at legal.services@edumail.vic.gov.au.

The [Complex Matter Support Team](#) can provide principals with advice and support when managing complaints that involving challenging parent behaviour or communications.

Reference:

<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/complaints>

Please refer also to the school's *Privacy & Information Sharing Policy* and *our Statement of Values & School Philosophy*.

REVIEW CYCLE

This policy, first developed in this format in May 2019, updated in July 2019 and again in September 2020, will be reviewed as part of the school's three-year review cycle or if guidelines change (latest DET update late July 2020.)

Mandatory for VRQA purposes
Presented to School Council for Noting on 29th October 2020

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