

COMPLAINTS, PARENTS POLICY

Rationale

- Our school has both a desire and a responsibility to ensure that high standards of conduct are maintained by staff and students at all times, and that complaints are managed and resolved fairly, efficiently, promptly and in accordance with relative legislation. The school's approach is related to creating a safe and supportive learning and working environment for students and staff.
- 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 process where there are different mechanisms in place to review certain decisions, for example, expulsion appeals.
- This policy is intended for School Leadership, staff and parents/carers.

Aims

- To ensure the Northern School for Autism meets its obligations to respond to parent concerns and complaints in an effective and timely manner.
- To ensure all complaints are addressed in line with the DET's legislative and regulatory framework, which includes the:
 - *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*
 - *Education and Training Reform Regulations 2007*
 - *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*
 - *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*
 - *Wrongs Act 1958.*

Definitions

For the purpose of this policy the following terms are defined as follows:

A **'parent'** includes:

a person who has parental responsibility for 'major long term issues' as defined in the *Family Law Act 1975* (Commonwealth)

a person appointed as 'guardian' pursuant to the *Children Youth and Families Act 2005* (Victoria)

an informal carer with whom the child normally or regularly resides, and who has day-to-day care and control of the child

a mature minor student

an adult student

A **'complaint'** is an expression of dissatisfaction with an action taken, decision made or service provided, or the failure to provide a service, take action or make a decision at a school. For example:

My child has been left out of the school's netball team for the third time in a row. She is an accomplished netballer and deserves to be part of the team. It is not fair that she has been left out and I want to know what you intend to do about this!

A complaint is considered to be **'resolved'** when the complainant and the Department (school, region or central office) agree on an appropriate response or remedy

A complaint is considered to be **'finalised'** when the Department (Regional Director, or other delegate of the Secretary) has made a final determination on the matter after exhausting the processes set out in this policy

A complaint is considered to be **'unresolved'** when agreement cannot be reached on a course of action and/or a remedy, or if the remedy cannot be implemented

Implementation

- The 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.
- When addressing a complaint, it is expected that all parties will:
 - raise and discuss issues in a courteous and respectful manner
 - acknowledge that the goal is to achieve an outcome that is in the affected student's best interests and acceptable to all parties
 - act in good faith and respect the privacy and confidentiality of those involved, as appropriate
 - recognise that all parties, including the broader school community, have rights and responsibilities that must be balanced
 - 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 Coordinators, 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:

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.

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.

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 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.

Timelines

The school will acknowledge receipt of your complaint as soon as possible (usually within 48 hours) 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.

Please note: If international students are enrolled, the school will maintain an international student's enrolment (to comply with student visa conditions) and appropriate student welfare support arrangements until the relevant complaints or appeals process is resolved. For further information, see: ISP Quality Standards and School Resources - International Student Program Quality Standards for Schools, Quality Standard 8 - Complaints and appeals.

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.

If necessary, parents will be directed to [Parent Complaints - Government Schools](#) –

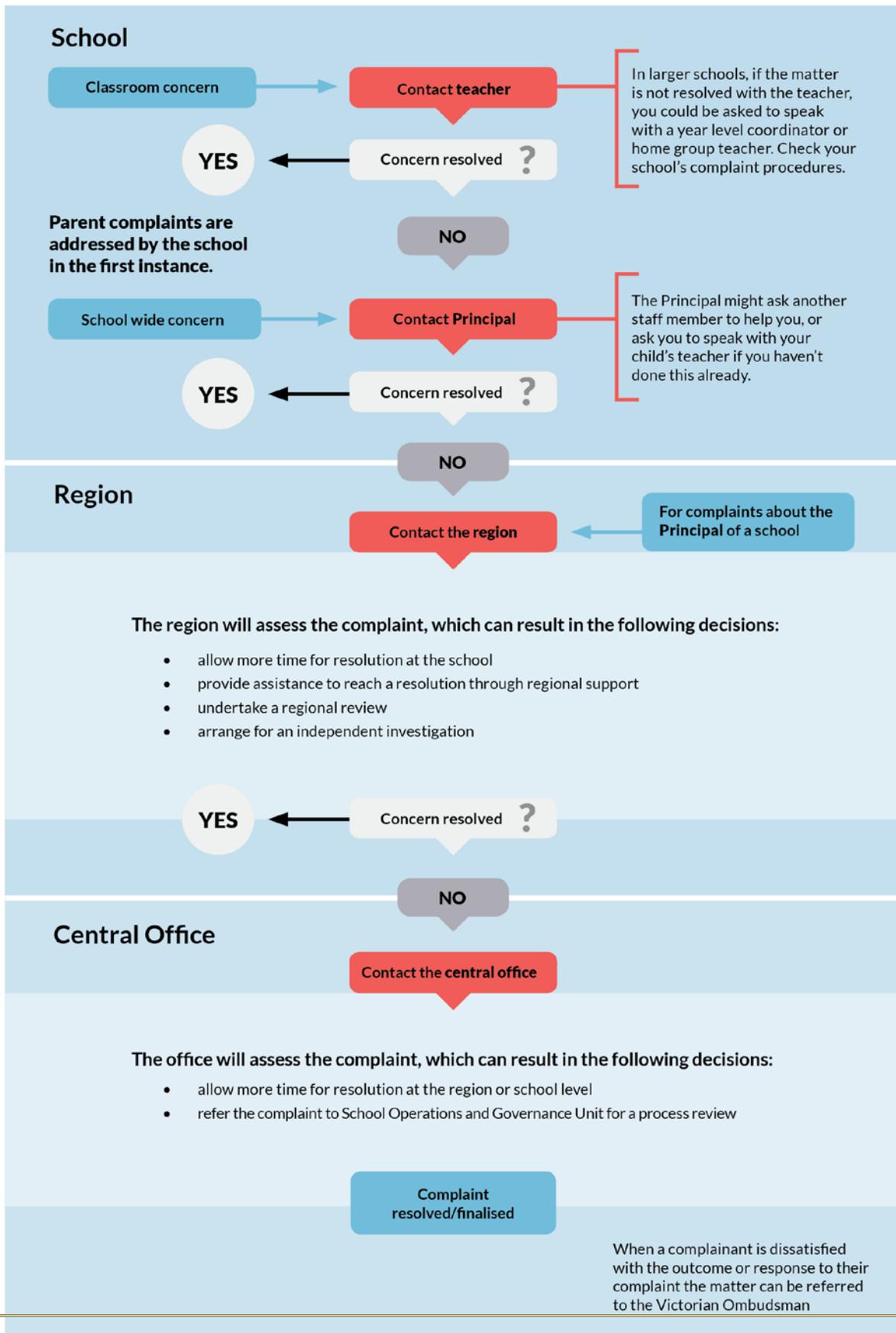
a website for parents outlining the Department's complaint process. Includes advice on how to raise concerns.

[Parent Complaints - Government Schools - General Information](#) –

a downloadable brochure for parents providing information about the Department's complaints process.

- Please refer also to the school's *Information Privacy Policy*.

PARENT COMPLAINT FLOWCHART



NSA Specific Procedures

Raising concerns and complaints

In the first instance the complaint should be made to the school. The complainant should email or write to the Campus Principal.

The school will make every effort to resolve concerns and complaints before involving other levels of the Department. The school will give a complainant a copy of this policy.

Expectations

The school expects a person raising a complaint to:

- Do so promptly; as soon as possible after the issue arises.
- Provide complete and factual information about the concern or complaint.
- Maintain and respect the privacy and confidentiality of 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.
- Acknowledge that a common goal is to achieve an outcome acceptable to all parties.
- All parties involved in addressing a complaint may seek the services of a mediator if there is difficulty reaching an agreement.

Remedies

If a concern or complaint is substantiated in whole or in part; the school will offer an appropriate remedy at its discretion. 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 a decision.
- To change a policy, procedure or practice.
- To cancel a debt (such as school payments) or refund a fee.

Unreasonable Conduct

Behaviour that is significantly outside the expectations of confidentiality, cooperation, courtesy and respect and/or is vexatious or orientated towards conflict is considered to be unreasonable conduct.

Communication

The school procedures for addressing concerns and complaints will be:

- Published on the school website.
- Provided in the information pack given to a parent/carer when the child enrolls.
- Printed in the Parent Handbook.

Concerns and Complaints Covered by the Procedures

- General issues of student behaviour that is contrary to the school's code of conduct.
- Incidents of bullying or harassment in the classroom or the schoolyard.
- Learning programs, assessment and reporting of student learning.
- Communication with parents.
- School fees and payments.
- General administrative issues.



All concerns and complaints will be addressed in line with the Department legislative and regulatory framework. A complaint is considered to be resolved when the complainant and school agree on an appropriate response or remedy.

Referral of Concerns or Complaints

If a person with a concern or complaint is not satisfied with the outcome determined by the school, they may contact the Department's appropriate regional office.

If the complaint cannot be resolved by the complainant, school and regional office working together, the regional office may refer it to the Department Group Co-ordination Division.

Complaint Unresolved

If the complaint remains unresolved at the completion of all the Department procedures or if the complainant is dissatisfied with the manner in which the complaint was handled by the Department, the complainant may then opt for review by an external agency such as Ombudsman Victoria.

References

www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/community/pages/parentcomplaints.aspx
www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/spag/community/policyparents.aspx

Review

This policy will be reviewed as part of the school's three yearly policy review cycle (August 2021) or if guidelines change (latest DET update mid-August 2018).

This policy was first ratified by the NSA School Council on 27 March, 2014

This update was ratified on 26 March 2015

This update was ratified on 18 February 2016

This update was ratified on 06.12.2018