



Bridgewood Primary School

Managing Complaints and Grievances

Rationale:

Our school has both a desire and a responsibility to ensure that high standards of conduct are maintained by parents, staff and students at all times, and that complaints are managed and resolved fairly, efficiently, promptly and in accordance with relative legislation and DET guidelines.

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

For the purpose of this policy 'parent' is defined as:

- 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

What is a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction and may concern:

- inappropriate and unprofessional conduct;
- unlawful harassment, including sexual harassment;
- an occupational health and safety issue, including bullying;
- a particular incident;
- a practice, policy or decision (made or not made) that a complainant believes is unfair, unreasonable or inappropriate;
- a workplace communication or interpersonal conflict.

What is the difference between a grievance and a complaint?

- A 'grievance' relates to an individual and the impact of decisions or actions within the school that, in respect to themselves, is considered to be unfair, inappropriate, contrary to Department policy or unlawful.
- A 'complaint' may involve an individual in respect to actions and decisions that are considered to be unfair, inappropriate, contrary to Department policy or unlawful.
- In some instances, a 'personal grievance' may arise from the outcome of 'complaint' procedures.

Aims:

- To provide a harmonious, positive and productive school environment.
- To resolve complaints fairly, efficiently, promptly and in accordance with relative legislation.

Implementation:

School responsibilities

It is the responsibility of our school to respond to and address written (letter and email) and verbal (face-to-face and phone) complaints raised by parents from our community using a fair, courteous and respectful process. The principal or staff member shall have a period of seven days to respond to a complaint or grievance.

As a minimum, the procedures at our school will include:

- Making sure parents know who to contact when making a complaint (teachers, welfare coordinator, principal, assistant principal)
 - Class related issue? (eg. individual student needs, academic progress, behaviour and discipline) Contact the child's teacher
 - Welfare issue? Contact the school's Welfare Coordinator
 - An issue with a teacher or not satisfied with a teacher's handling of a complaint? Contact the Assistant Principal or Principal
 - A school issue? (eg. Fees and payments, parent communications, bullying, policies, student free days, etc.) Contact the Principal
- A description of the actions the school's personnel will take once a complaint is received will include:
 - Listening respectfully to the perspective of complainants.
 - Making reasonable attempts to resolve complaints quickly and clearly. Initial response should occur within 48 hours but not longer than 7 days. An expected time frame for resolving a complaint will be discussed with the complainant.
 - Maintaining communication with all parties about the progress of resolution including the types of outcomes that the parent could expect
 - Providing a safe and supportive environment where everyone is treated with respect, fairness and dignity.
 - Ensuring the safety, security, health and wellbeing of all community members.
 - Recording, and keeping secure, documentation of any actions taken to resolve the complaint
 - Consideration of all parent complaints: raising the issues in the complaint with relevant staff and/or members of the school community and consulting, where appropriate, with relevant sections of the Department and/or external agencies for technical or other advice
 - Discussion of the school's findings with the parent in an attempt to reach an agreed resolution
 - Maintaining confidentiality. Both the complainant and the school must work respectfully together and not breach confidentiality
 - Consideration of the engagement of a mediator where a complaint has the potential to become intractable
 - In the case of an unresolved complaint, providing further advice regarding who else could assist to resolve the complaint (E.g. Region, Central Office)
- Publication of the school's complaint-handling procedures within the school community and making them readily available (website, newsletter, information sessions)
- Maintaining a record of all complaints, both written and verbal, at the school
- Review of the school's complaint-handling procedures regularly
- The seeking of advice from either the central office or region about the management of complaints, including complex or challenging complaints or complainants and the use of mediation/conciliation services, and seek specialist or technical advice from external agencies and/or the Department when required.

- Ensuring all school personnel are aware of the school's parent complaint-handling procedures and provision of opportunities for staff to attend training/professional development activities with a focus on complaint management.
- Active assistance of parents with the complaint process, informing them that at any point of the complaint process they are able to be supported by an advocate/support person.

Parents/Guardians

Our school encourages relationships of responsibility and respect amongst members of the school community. The complaint process can be a difficult emotional process for all parties. The school asks that parents/guardians consider the following principles when making a complaint.

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

- Do so promptly, as soon as possible after the issue/incident occurs. (By phone, in writing and/or in person)
- Provide complete and factual information about the concern or complaint. Relevant dates, time and place.
- 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 difference in values, rather than judge and blame.
- Acknowledge that the common goal is to achieve an outcome that is acceptable to all parties.
- Recognise that all parties have rights and responsibilities which must be balanced.
- Acknowledge the relevant College values as they relate to the complaint.

Parents may bring a support person, such as an unpaid advocate or friend, to meetings with the Principal or Assistant Principal. Anyone bringing an outsider to a meeting should give prior notice to the other party first.

The role of the advocate/support person in this process is a supportive and enabling one. A complainant's advocate/support person may be a member of the family, a friend, a community member or a person provided through an appropriate support/advocate agency. The complainant should inform the principal if they want to include an advocate/support person in the complaint process and provide the name of the advocate, contact details and the relationship to the complainant.

Resolving parent complaints :

The principal (or deputy) assumes overall responsibility for the managing complaints process and ensuring that complaints are resolved. Where complaint resolution has not been able to be resolved at the school level, the principal will advise the complainant about other options that could include mediation, counseling, advocacy/support. This could include Region, Central Office or independent providers such as the Victorian Ombudsman Office, Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission or Parents Victoria.

Where a complaint is found to be justified, the following resolutions may apply:

- an apology or expression of regret
- a change of decision
- a change of policy, procedure or practice
- a refund of parent payments
- offering the opportunity for student counseling or other support

Reference: [Parent Complaints Department of Education and Training Guidelines](#)

The recommended Department of Education and Training approach to raising and resolving complaints is outlined in the following flowchart:

PARENT COMPLAINT FLOWCHART

