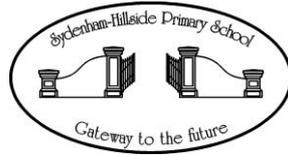


Sydenham-Hillside Primary School No3559



Parent Complaints Policy

Rationale

Sydenham-Hillside Primary School recognises that it is in the best interest of students for there to be a trusting and cooperative relationship between parent and school. Complaints are an important way for the school community to provide information and feedback to a school. Sydenham-Hillside Primary School considers that every complaint provides a valuable opportunity for reflection and learning.

Sydenham-Hillside Primary School recognises a parent's right to make a complaint and its responsibility to provide a framework within which efforts can be made to resolve complaints.

An effective complaint handling system has a clear process for resolving complaints, treats people fairly, is timely and provides those people involved in a complaint with a fair opportunity to respond to issues and to present their views.

Aim

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that:

- Sydenham-Hillside Primary School meets its obligation to respond to parent complaints in a fair, effective and efficient manner.
- Parents are informed of how they can make a complaint. This policy does not apply to matters where rights and processes for review and appeal already exist. These include:
 - student expulsions, see: [Expulsions](#)
 - complaints about staff that if upheld would constitute misconduct, see: [Complaints, unsatisfactory performance and misconduct](#)
 - student critical incident matters, see: [Student Critical Incident Advisory Unit](#) (DET employees only)
 - other criminal matters, see: [Police – Department Protocols](#)

General information about handling complaints

Parents of students who attend Sydenham-Hillside Primary School who have a complaint should, in the first instance, make the complaint to the school, except when the complaint is about the principal of the school. Complaints about school principals should be referred to the appropriate region.

The Principal is responsible for the efficient and effective organisation, management and administration of the school including the school's complaint handling processes.

When addressing a complaint it is expected that parents and school personnel will:

- show respect and understanding of each other's point of view
- operate within applicable legislation
- acknowledge that their goal is to achieve an outcome acceptable to all parties
- act in good faith and in a calm and courteous manner
- recognise that all parties have rights and responsibilities which must be balanced.

Protected disclosures

Where a parent has real and substantial concerns that, as a result of raising a complaint, they may suffer a detriment and the allegations relate to corrupt conduct, they may have access to protection under the provisions of the *Protected Disclosure Act 2012* (PD Act). The PD Act defines the types of complaints that may be accepted as complaints under this Act. For further information, see: [Protected Disclosure Act 2012 - Making and Handling Protected Disclosures](#)

Unreasonable complainant conduct

All complaints should be considered in accordance with the school's complaint handling procedures including when parent behaviour is thought to be unreasonable.

While a decision maker considers a range of factors and views, they may at any point in the process outlined in this policy consider a parent's behaviour to be unreasonable. In these circumstances, it is appropriate for the decision maker to communicate the basis on which the conclusion was made to the parent in writing. The decision maker may also indicate an acceptable procedure for future communication with the parent about their complaint.

The Department of Education and Training (DET) considers behaviour to be unreasonable when:

- it is clearly and significantly outside the expectations of cooperation, courtesy and respect
- it calls for staff resources and time unjustified by the nature or significance of the complaint
- an action or complaint is brought without merit, often to cause annoyance to another person
- it is oriented towards conflict.

Anonymous complaints

The DET requires all complaints to be considered, however, it recognises that its staff might not be able to fully consider a complaint if they cannot effectively liaise with the parent. Furthermore, anonymous complaints raise natural justice issues for respondents who have a right to know particulars of the allegations made against them.

Complaint escalation

Parents should be made aware that they are able to take their complaint to the Victorian Ombudsman if they are dissatisfied with the outcome or response from the DET, or if they feel their complaint is not being handled properly or in a timely manner.

When it is unlikely that a complaint will be resolved using the school's complaint handling procedures the Principal should consider seeking advice from the relevant region.

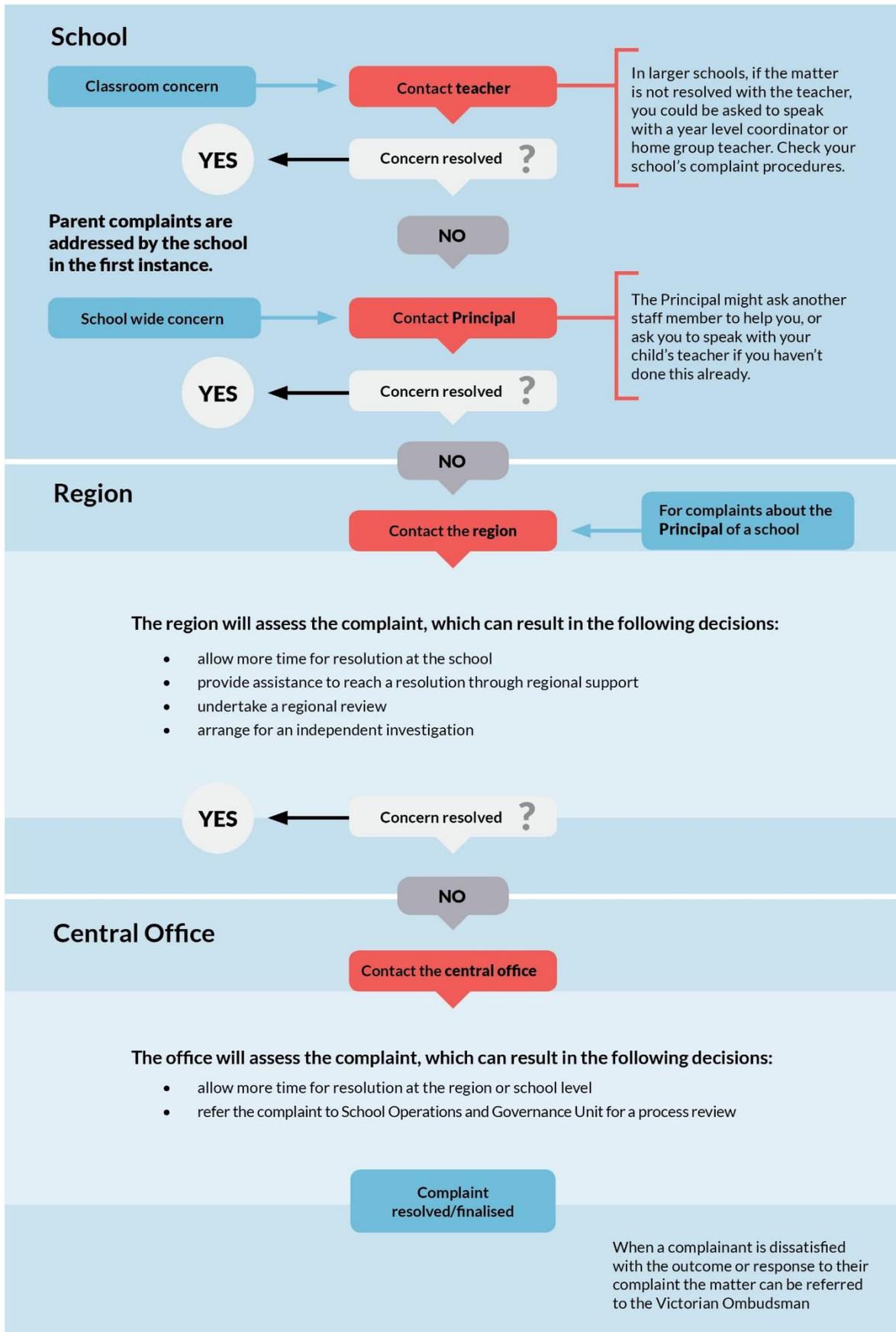
When a parent is not satisfied with the manner in which their complaint has been treated by the school, or their complaint is about the Principal of the school, the parent can contact their local region. For further information, see: [Role of the region](#)

When a complaint remains unresolved after referral to the region, parents are able to request a review of process through the Deputy Secretary, Regional Services Group. See: [Role of the central office](#)

It may not always be possible to resolve all complaints to the parent's satisfaction. This could happen when the nature of the issues raised in the complaint is governed by the DET's policies or guidelines or if the parent has unrealistic expectations about the outcome of their complaint.

Parents should be made aware that when complaints are sent to areas of the DET not identified above, the complaint may be referred to the relevant level as identified in the following process image.

PARENT COMPLAINT FLOWCHART



Students with a disability

Students with disabilities have rights under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Commonwealth), the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (Commonwealth) and the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Victoria) to access their education on the same basis as their peers, including the right to reasonable adjustments.

As with all complaints to which this policy applies, parents should raise any concerns or complaints regarding the treatment of a student with a disability with the school in the first instance. The community liaison officer or the regional disabilities coordinator can also provide advice to parents when they are seeking to raise a concern or make a complaint at their school.

The DET also recognises that parents of students with a disability can raise complaints or concerns regarding a student with a disability in a number of forums, including:

- the Australian Human Rights Commission – in relation to complaints regarding compliance with the *Disability Discrimination Act* or the *Disability Standards for Education*
- the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission – in relation to complaints regarding compliance with the *Equal Opportunity Act*
- in consultation with the principal and any established student support group, to the Wellbeing, Health and Engagement Division of the DET. This may relate to matters arising under the Program for Students with Disabilities, including applications, Years 6-7 reviews, reappraisals and appeal procedures. See: [Program for Students with Disabilities](#)

Implementation

Sydenham-Hillside Primary School will treat parent concerns seriously and reflect on the issues raised through complaints to change its practice and improve the learning opportunities for its students.

Sydenham-Hillside Primary School's Statement of Values clarifies and strengthens the roles of principals, parents, teachers and students, and helps to establish a cooperative school environment with realistic expectations of what can be achieved by the school. In such an environment, open, two-way communication, free of blame, will assist schools to handle concerns or complaints being raised by a parent.

When Sydenham-Hillside Primary School receives a complaint (either written or verbal) from a parent, the below outlined process is followed.

School responsibilities

Sydenham-Hillside Primary School will respond to and address written (letter and email) and verbal (face-to-face and phone) complaints raised by parents from their school community.

All parent complaints will be addressed by:

- raising the issues in the complaint with relevant staff and/or members of the school community
- consulting, where appropriate, with relevant sections of the DET and/or external agencies for technical or other advice
- discussing the school's findings with the parent in an attempt to reach an agreed resolution
- considering the engagement of a mediator where a complaint has the potential to become intractable
- publicise the school's complaint-handling procedures within the school community and make them readily available
- review the school's complaint-handling procedures regularly in line with DET guidelines and the review process
- ensure that complaints received are recorded and actions taken to resolve the complaint are well documented
- ensure a school record of all complaints, both written and verbal, is maintained at the school
- seek 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 DET when required.
- For further assistance concerning challenging or complex complaints see: [Unreasonable Complainant Conduct](#)

- Ensure all school personnel are aware of the school's parent complaint-handling procedures and provide opportunities for staff to attend training/professional development activities with a focus on complaint management.
- Actively assist 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. 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 advocate/support person in the parent complaint process does not receive a fee for service. 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. An advocate/support person's role may include:
 - assistance for the complainant to clarify the issues in the complaint
 - discussion of difficulties being experienced by the complainant
 - assistance in the development of a cooperative and collaborative working relationship between the complainant and the school community
 - assistance for the complainant to understand DET policy and guidelines and the resolution being proposed for the complaint.

Where a complaint is found to be justified, Sydenham-Hillside Primary School will resolve complaints by:

- 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 counselling or other support.

If a parent is not satisfied that their complaint has been resolved by the school, or if their complaint is about the principal of the school, they may refer their complaint to the relevant region.

Evaluation

This policy will be reviewed as part of the school's three year review cycle or as new DET guidelines become available.

This policy has been ratified by School Council on 23/02/2017

Principal

School Council President
