

## **BELMONT PRIMARY SCHOOL ISSUES RESOLUTION POLICY**

### **Rationale**

- Positive, clear and effective processes for resolving grievances between the school and community members assists in the building of strong relationships, dispels anxiety and ultimately provides students with an enhanced learning environment.

### **Aims**

- To provide clear, positive and fair processes that allow grievances to be aired and resolved in a timely and effective manner.

### **Implementation**

- Our school prides itself on clear, consultative and open communication.
- While we accept our responsibility to consult, and to communicate both clearly and effectively with the community, community members also have a responsibility to read notices and newsletters, to attend briefings, and to seek clarification when required.
- There may still be times when members of the community disagree or are confused about the things we are doing.

*The following guidelines explain how the school and parents will deal with any concern or complaint.*

### **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, 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.

The school will address any concerns and complaints received from parents:

- courteously
- efficiently
- fairly, keeping in mind the outcomes for all stakeholders
- promptly, or within the timeline agreed with the concern or complaint
- in accordance with due process, principles of natural justice and the Department's regulatory framework.

### **Raising concerns and complaints**

In the first instance, a complaint should be made to the school.

The complainant should *telephone, visit* or *write* to:

- the student's teacher
- the Area Team Leader
- the Assistant Principal about issues relating to staff members or complex student issues
- the Principal about issues relating to school policy, school management, staff members or very complex student issues.

Parents may choose to use the school diary to make first contact with a class teacher or call the office on 52 432972 to make an appointment at a mutually agreed time with the relevant staff member. (Complainants should be mindful it may be difficult for class teachers to give complete attention to parents directly before or after school).

Parents Club or School Council members who are approached with a concern or complaint will not become involved in confidential or personal issues, and will refer specific grievances to the Principal or the School Council President. The Principal and School Council President are in the best position to ensure all concerns or complaints are addressed appropriately and in a manner which meets the agreed policy of the school.

### **Some basic principles when dealing with concerns or complaints:**

All concerns or complaints are to be kept confidential

The school should ensure concerns / complaints are addressed promptly, within agreed timelines where possible. The length of time may vary according to the complexity of the issue, however, in most cases the school should attempt to resolve parent concerns or complaints within 20 school days but in the majority of cases much sooner than this. The school will communicate to the complainant any reasons for a delay in addressing their concern or complaint.

Complainants and the school can seek the services of an advocate if they feel they are unable to express their concern clearly. An advocate can be a friend or someone who is available through an appropriate support organisation who does not receive a fee for service.

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

The principal and School Council president will exercise his/her judgement as to whether or not they will act upon anonymous concerns or complaints.

The principal may provide community members with appropriate departmental contact names and numbers if concerns or complaints are not resolved.

The school should brief all members of staff (including volunteers) about its concerns and complaints procedures annually. It must also provide staff with access to training and support materials appropriate to their responsibilities under the procedures.

### **Managing concerns and complaints**

Staff will use their professional discretion to determine whether or not a concern or complaint should be recorded. In most cases concerns or complaints should be recorded to assist the school in meeting the needs of all stakeholders. Complaints of a serious or repeated nature must be recorded and provided to the Assistant Principal and Principal. This will be recorded on a template provided to all staff. The details recorded are listed below:

- name and contact details (with permission) of the person with a concern or complaint
- the date the concern was expressed or complaint made
- the form in which the concern or complaint was received (such as face to face, by telephone, in writing, by email)
- a brief description of the concern or complaint
- details of the school personnel responding to the concern or complaint
- action taken on the concern or complaint
- the outcome of action taken on the concern or complaint
- any recommendations for future improvement in the school's policy or procedures.

### **Addressing concerns and complaints**

All complaints or concerns will be noted and acted on promptly by the staff member who receives the complaint.

When the complaint is easily resolved in a telephone call, a brief note in the school's/principal's/teacher's diary recording the issue and the resolution may be all that is required.

The school will :

- make every effort to resolve concerns and complaints as quickly as possible. If the concern or complaint involves many students and a range of issues, the school may need more time to investigate and resolve it
- give a complainant a copy of its complaints procedures (on request and on entry to the school eg. Prep students/New students)
- determine whether a concern or complaint should be managed through the school's concerns and complaints process or through other complaints processes of the Department
- acknowledge all complaints made in writing and where appropriate those received otherwise. It will provide the complainant with a timeline for investigating the complaint
- investigate all complaints and involve Area Team Leaders and/or the Assistant Principal / Principal where required. A staff member, Area Leader or Principal will provide a response to the complainant.

Concerns and complaints about general school matters (such as timing of events, school policies and facilities) will be addressed by the principal or a relevant staff member.

Should the complaint involve complex issues, the school might need to take advice from the Department's regional office which may take more time. The school will tell the complainant the new timeline for addressing the complaint and the reasons for any delays. In all cases, the school will try to resolve a concern or complaint within 20 school days.

### **Resolutions**

If a concern or complaint is substantiated in whole or part, the school will offer an appropriate action and will implement the action as soon as possible.

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

If a person with a concern or complaint is not satisfied with the outcome determined by the school, they are encouraged to contact the principal again or be provided with the contact details of the Department's Barwon South Western Regional Office.

The officer from the region will ask the complainant for a complete and 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 Department's Group Coordination Division. The Division will ask the complainant for a complete and factual account in writing of the concern or complaint and the complainant's opinion about why the school and regional office did not resolve it to their satisfaction and will ask the

complainant to outline their view on the course of action required to resolve the complaint. Where the complainant is unable to provide a written account the officer from Group Coordination Division should act on the information provided.

### **Communication and training**

The school will make information about procedures for addressing concerns and complaints readily available to parents and the school community, in clear and easy-to-understand language.

The information will include:

- how a person can make a complaint
- the person's responsibilities
- information to be provided by the person
- who the person should contact and their contact details
- the process and timeframes for managing concerns and complaints

The school's procedures for addressing concerns and complaints will be:

- published on the school's website
- referenced in the parent's handbook
- available on request

The school will:

- brief all members of staff (including volunteers) about its procedures to address concerns and complaints annually
- provide staff with(or access to) training and support appropriate to their responsibilities under the procedures
- ensure staff who manage complaints demonstrate the personal attributes outlined in the Good Practice Guide: Ombudsman Victoria's guide to complaint handling for Victorian public sector agencies.

### **Evaluation**

The school will review its information about complaints made over time to:

- identify common or recurring issues that may need addressing
- assess the effectiveness of these and other procedures and whether they are being followed
- use information provided to the school through the Parent Opinion Survey on the views of parents
- the School Council will regularly review its policy and procedures to effectively address parent concerns and complaints as part of its cyclic policy and procedure review schedule.

### **Definition of terms**

A 'concern' is an expression of interest (because of its importance and effect) which is raised in order to improve or change a situation.

e.g. I believe the school's computer resources are inadequate. I think the school should review its policy in this area. Not all grades have the same access to new computers.

A 'complaint' is an expression of grievance or resentment where the complainant is seeking redress or justice.

e.g. My daughter 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 a part of the team. It is not fair that she is left out and I want you to do something about it.

This policy is based on the following guideline:

'Addressing Parents' Concerns and Complaints Effectively': policy and guides – Office for Government School Education 2009

**Appendix A:**

Parents' Concerns and Complaints. This template is to be used for concerns and / or complaints about serious issues or issues of a repeated nature.

Name Of Complainant (if permission granted)
Contact Details of Complainant (if permission granted)
Date the concern was expressed or complaint made
How was the concern or complaint received? (e.g. face to face, by telephone, in writing, by email)
Brief description of the concern or complaint
Details of the school personnel responding to the concern or complaint
Action taken on the concern or complaint
The outcome of action taken on the concern or complaint
Any recommendations for future improvement in the school's policy or procedures.
Person responsible: