



## WILLOW GROVE PRIMARY SCHOOL

### PARENT/GUARDIAN CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS POLICY

#### **Preamble**

The Principal, teachers and staff at Willow Grove Primary School recognise that it is in the best interest of students for there to be a trusting and cooperative relationship between parent and school.

Complaints and concerns are an important way for the parents/guardians to provide information and feedback to a school. The School takes all complaints and concerns seriously.

The 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. It is the school's belief that parent complaints are best handled at the school level in an environment where parents feel able to speak up about issues concerning the education of their children.

The educational well-being of students is recognised by Willow Grove Primary School as the highest priority in resolving all parent/guardian concerns and complaints.

#### **Purpose of this policy**

The aim of this policy is to provide a clear process for resolving complaints that treats people fairly, is timely and provides for all parties involved in a complaint (including as appropriate teachers, parents, the Principal, general staff and students) a fair opportunity to present their views and to respond to issues.

The policy also provides information for parents/guardians to be able to seek further support or redress should they feel that their complaint has not been handled to their satisfaction at the school level.

Note: This policy does not apply to matters where rights and processes for review and appeal already exist. These include:

- student expulsions,
- complaints about staff that if upheld would constitute misconduct,
- student critical incident matters,
- other criminal matters,

NB: Parents/Guardians are advised to seek advice from the Principal if they believe their complaint falls into one of the above categories

### **Guidelines**

1. All members of the school community will be made aware of the Parent / Guardian Concerns and Complaints Policy.
2. For concerns and complaints to be resolved, the Parent / Guardian Concerns and Complaints protocol must be followed.
3. This policy applies to parent / guardian concerns and complaints regarding any aspect of the care and or education of their children at Willow Grove Primary School.
4. It may not always be possible to resolve all parent / guardian concerns and complaints to the parent's satisfaction. This could happen when the nature of the issues raised in the complaint is governed by the Department's policies or guidelines or if the parent has unrealistic expectations about the outcome of their complaint.

## **Expected Behaviours**

Willow Grove Primary School's approach to handling concerns and complaints is based on the schools values of Respect, Resilience, Teamwork and Community. All interactions between parents/guardians, students, teachers, the Principal and other staff are expected to be based on the expected behaviours detailed below.

### **RESPECT**

- Actively listen
- Maintain confidentiality
- Raise concerns with the school directly
- Make an appointment with respect to the teachers' time

### **RESILIENCE**

- Be patient
- Act when necessary
- Allow students the opportunity to solve problems. Overcoming challenges enables kids to develop their own resilience and resourcefulness.

### **TEAMWORK**

- Be approachable, understand each member's point of view and take all concerns seriously
- Work together in partnership, so that the best results can be achieved for all students
- Trust that all decisions and actions have the student's best interests at heart.

### **COMMUNITY**

- Display empathy
- Encourage a solutions based approach

## Implementation

1. The school community will be provided with the Concerns and Complaints policy and protocol. The protocol will be included in the Parent Information Book and included on the school's website.
2. For the resolution of a concern or complaint the Concerns and Complaints Protocol will be used.
3. Every effort will be made at the school level to resolve the concern within the school environment to the satisfaction of all parties within a timely manner
4. A parent/guardian may request an advocate be present at any meeting (see definition below for the role of the advocate)
5. An interpreter may be present at any meeting
6. If a complainant is aggressive or violent, school staff have the right to discontinue the conversation.
7. All communications and actions taken regarding a concern/complaint will be fully documented by the relevant staff member

## Definitions

- 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.
- a '**concern**' a worried or nervous feeling about something, or something that makes a parent/guardian or their child feel worried; a matter that engages a parent/guardian or student's attention, interest, or care, or that affects that person's welfare or happiness
- 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.
- An '**advocate**' 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 co-operative and collaborative working relationship between the complainant and the school community
- assistance for the complainant to understand Department policy and guidelines and the resolution being proposed for the complaint.

### **Resolving Complaints**

A principal may contact the regional director and request the region's intervention to help resolve a complaint. The principal would need to have exhausted the school's parent complaint-handling procedures and be of the belief that the complaint would not be able to be resolved at the school level. The parent should be advised that their complaint will be handled by personnel from the region.

Where a complaint is found to be justified, schools are able to 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.

### **What to do if a complaint/concern is perceived to not be handled satisfactorily at the school level**

1. Firstly, parents/guardians are encouraged to view the Departments processes for complaints at: Parent Complaints – Government Schools prior to escalating any grievances.
2. Should the Parent/Guardian feel that their complaint has not been handled to their satisfaction at the school level they can then contact the Regional Office for the School, the South East Victoria Region for further advice/support.
3. Should the Parent/Guardian feel that their complaint has not been handled to their satisfaction at the Regional level, they can then approach the Department of Education to request a Review of Process through the Deputy Secretary, Regional Services Group.
4. Should the Parents/Guardians be dissatisfied with the outcome or response from the Department of Education, or if they feel their complaint is not being handled properly or in a timely manner can then take their complaint to the Victorian Ombudsman.

### **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). 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 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.

### **Evaluation and Review**

This policy will be reviewed as part of the school's policy review cycle. In addition, the school will monitor parent/guardian concerns and complaints and consider issues through the concerns and complaints process, and any other relevant information from the parent opinion survey.

Revised: 21<sup>st</sup> November 2017



## **Willow Grove Primary School**

### **Parent/Guardian Concerns and Complaints Protocol**

All concerns/complaints involving a child should always as a first point of contact be directed to the classroom teacher. The School expects the majority of complaints/concerns involving a child to be resolved at this level.

All concerns/complaints related to school policy or school management should be directed to the Principal. Where issues raised are within the control of the School, the school expects the majority of complaints/concerns relating to school policy or school management to be resolved at this level.

All concerns/complaints relating to the Principal, should be directed to the Regional Office for the School, the South East Victoria Region.

#### **Raising a concern/complaint with the classroom teacher:**

##### **Step 1**

- Raise the concern/complaint with the relevant classroom teacher via telephone, in writing or in person.
- If a meeting is required, request a mutually convenient time to be scheduled.
- The classroom teacher will consider the concern/complaint and where possible will resolve the issue to the parent/guardians satisfaction at the first point of contact with the parent/guardian, or at the meeting if one is scheduled.
- If the issue is not or cannot be resolved at this stage and the parent/guardian and/or the teacher feels the teacher can further assist:
  - ❖ the classroom teacher can offer to, or be requested by the parent/guardian to, investigate the matter further by proceeding to step 2
- If the issue is not resolved at this stage and the parent/guardian feels the teacher cannot or will not further assist:
  - ❖ the parent/guardian can make an appointment with the Principal to discuss the matter further

## Step 2

- The classroom teacher will consider and explore the concern/complaint and where required investigate and prepare information relevant to the concern/complaint.
- A meeting will be conducted between the classroom teacher, parents / guardians and student/s as required.
- Where possible the complaint/concern will be 'resolved' at this level:
  - ❖ with no further action required or
  - ❖ as appropriate, with a determination/plan put in place to address the concern/complaint with no further action required or
  - ❖ as appropriate, with a plan put in place to address the concern/complaint with this plan having agreed timelines and milestones for review and assessment to ensure that the strategy determined achieves measurable/definable positive outcomes
- If the issue is not resolved at any point after the meeting at step 2 and the parent/guardian feels the teacher cannot or will not further assist:
  - ❖ the parent/guardian can make an appointment with the Principal to discuss the matter further

## **Raising a concern/complaint with the Principal:**

- Raise the concern/complaint with the Principal via telephone, in writing or in person.
- If a meeting is required, request a mutually convenient time to be scheduled.
- If the issue is not or cannot be resolved at this stage and the parent/guardian and/or the Principal feels the Principal can further assist:
- the Principal will offer to, or be requested by the parent/guardian to, investigate the matter
- If the issue is not resolved at this stage and the parent/guardian feels the Principal cannot or will not further assist:
  - ❖ the parent/guardian can raise their concern or complaint with the Regional Office for the Department of Education.

# PARENT COMPLAINT FLOWCHART

