



## **WILLOW GROVE PRIMARY SCHOOL**

### **CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS POLICY**

#### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Provide a clear complaints resolution process at Willow Grove Primary School so that parents and members of the community are informed of how they can raise complaints or concerns about issues arising at our school, and how those complaints will be addressed by the school.
- Ensure that all complaints regarding Willow Grove Primary School are managed in a timely, effective, fair and respectful manner.
- Provide information for parents and members of the community 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.

#### **SCOPE**

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.

Note: This policy does not apply to matters where other formal processes already exist. For example:

- student expulsions,
- fraud and corruption,
- Legal claims,
- other criminal matters,

In these, and other limited instances, we may need to refer the complainant to another government agency or another Department of Education and Training process where there are different mechanisms in place to review certain decisions.

#### **POLICY**

Willow Grove Primary 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.

Willow Grove Primary School recognises the right of parents and community members 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 complaints regarding our school are best handled at the school level in an environment where parents and community members feel able to speak up about issues concerning the education of our children.

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

### **Expected Behaviours**

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

#### **RESPECT**

- Actively listen
- Maintain privacy and confidentiality of those involved, as appropriate
- Raise concerns with the school directly
- Behave with courtesy
- Make an appointment with respect to each parties' availability

#### **RESILIENCE**

- Be patient
- Act when necessary
- Allow students the opportunity to solve problems. Overcoming challenges enables children to develop their own resilience and resourcefulness.
- Recognise that schools and the Department may be subject to legal constraints on their ability to act or disclose information in some circumstances.

#### **TEAMWORK**

- Be approachable, understand each member's point of view and take all concerns seriously
- Act in good faith and cooperate, focusing on a resolution to the complaint that achieves the best result for all students concerned
- Trust that all decisions and actions have the student's best interests at heart.

#### **COMMUNITY**

- Display empathy
- Encourage a solutions-based approach

- Operate within and seek reasonable resolutions that comply with any applicable legislation and Department policy.

## Implementation

1. All members of the school community will be made aware of 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 attached to this Policy 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 '**Complainant**' is the party making the complaint
- 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.

## **Complaints Process**

Please refer to the attached Concerns and Complaints Protocol which explains the process of raising a complaint with the school.

## **Resolving Complaints**

Where appropriate, Willow Grove Primary 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.

It may not always be possible to resolve all parent / guardian concerns and complaints to the parent's satisfaction.

Willow Grove Primary School may also refer a complaint to the department's South Eastern Victorian Regional office if we believe that we have done all we can to address the complaint. The school 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.

## **Escalation**

If you are not satisfied that your complaint has been resolved by the school, or if your complaint is about the Principal and you do not want to raise it directly with them, then the complaint should be escalated as follows:

1. Firstly, parents/guardians are encouraged to view the Departments processes for complaints at: [Parent complaints policy](#) (including the role of the Regional Office) 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 local regional

office for the School, the South East Victoria Region, on 1300 338 738 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 escalate the complaint further to the Departments Central Office.
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 an individual has real and substantial concerns that, as a result of raising a complaint, they may suffer a detriment and the allegations relate to improper conduct, including fraudulent and corrupt conduct, they may have access to protection under the provisions of the *Protected Disclosure Act 2012* (PD Act). For further information see:

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/Pages/reportingfraud.aspx>

### **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.

### **FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES**

The Department of Education policy can be found at: [Parent complaints policy](#)  
Please also refer the Willow Grove Primary Schools Statement of Vision and Values

### **EVALUATION AND REVIEW**

This policy was last updated on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2020 and is scheduled for review in 2023.

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.



## **Willow Grove Primary School**

### **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 on 1300 338 738.

### **Preparation for raising a concern or complaint**

Willow Grove Primary 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 Willow Grove Primary School

### **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/guardian's 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.

### **Timeline:**

Willow Grove Primary School will acknowledge receipt of your complaint as soon as possible (usually within two school days) 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 meeting where appropriate within 10 working days of the complaint being raised. In situations where further time is required, the school will consult with you and discuss any interim solutions to the dispute that can be put in place.

## COMPLAINTS MANAGEMENT FLOWCHART

