

RAISING CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Rationale

This policy has been developed in response to the Department of Education and Training (DET) expectations following a review, in 2005, by the Ombudsman Victoria on the handling of parents' complaints and concerns. The school's approach to handling concerns and complaints is underpinned by our values of: Respect, Teamwork, Excellence, Integrity, Commitment and Knowledge.

We also recognise the importance of:

- providing a safe and supportive learning environment for our students
- providing a safe working environment for staff
- building positive relationships between all members of the Whittlesea Secondary College Community – students, families, staff and the wider community.

Aims

To ensure the school has in place a range of procedures for dealing with concerns and complaints. It should be recognised that parent complaints mostly relate to one of the following areas:

- the management of an incident between students at the school
- the educational (or other) progress of a student
- the development and implementation of school and general education policy.

Implementation

Scope

The procedures cover concerns and complaints relating to:

- general issues of students' misbehaviour that are contrary to the school's code of conduct
- incidents of bullying or harassment in the classroom or school yard
- learning programs, assessment and reporting of student learning
- communication with families and carers
- school fees and payments
- general administrative issues.

The procedures do not cover concerns and issues related to:

- student discipline involving expulsions
- complaints about employee conduct or performance (as these should be dealt with by performance management, grievance resolution of disciplinary action)
- complaints by employees relating their employment
- student critical incident matters
- other criminal matters.

Child Safety

- As a result of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, the Victorian Government introduced a range of measures to better protect children. These measures include:
 - The Child Safe Standards
 - Reportable Conduct Scheme
 - Organisational Duty of Care

- Whittlesea Secondary College (WSC) uphold our Statement of Commitment to Child Safety (refer to the WSC Child Safe Environment Policy, Appendix A).
- All staff, volunteers, contractors, and any other member of the school community involved in child-related work will be informed about, and expected to adhere to, the Whittlesea Secondary College Child Safety Code of Conduct (refer to the WSC Child Safe Environment Policy, Appendix B).
- The Child Safety Code of Conduct applies in all school situations, including school camps and in the use of digital technology and social media.

Expectations

- The school expects an individual 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 in a calm and courteous manner
 - show respect and understanding of each other's point of view and value differences rather than to judge and blame
 - recognise that all parties have rights and responsibilities which must be balanced.

Communication

- The school will make information about procedures for addressing concerns and complaints available to parents and the school community, in clear and easy to understand language and, where appropriate, in a range of languages and formats easily accessible to everyone so that no-one is disadvantaged.
- This policy (including the related procedures) will be:
 - included with the enrolment package handed to all new arrivals at the school
 - published on the school website.
- Reporting procedures to School Council will include an indication of complaints received.

Training and Support for Staff

- The school will:
 - brief all staff members about its procedures to address complaints and concerns
 - provide staff with training and support appropriate to their responsibilities under the procedures.
- The procedures address concerns and complaints in collaboration with families and the school community.

The school will address any concerns or complaints received by parents/carers in the following manner:

- courteously
- efficiently
- fairly
- promptly, or within a timeline agreed upon by both parties
- in accordance with due process, principles of natural justice and the DET regulatory framework.

Raising Concerns and Complaints Procedures

For an overview of the process, refer to Appendix A: Raising Concerns and Complaints Process

How to raise a concern or complaint

In the first instance, a complaint should be made directly to the school. The complainant should telephone, write to or visit:

- the student's relevant classroom teacher about learning issues
- the relevant student managers or sub school managers if students from several classes or year levels are involved
- the principal or assistant principal about issues relating to complex student issues
- the principal about issues relating to staff members, school policy, school management, or extremely complex student issues

If you are unsure of whom to contact, please telephone the General Office on 9719 1200. The Office staff will then organise for an appointment to be made with the appropriate personnel.

Support available when raising a concern

- Complainants can seek the services of an advocate when they feel they are unable to express their concern clearly. An advocate can be a friend or someone who is available through an appropriate organisation who does not receive a fee.
- All parties involved in addressing a complaint may seek the services of a mediator when there is difficulty coming to an agreement.

Managing and addressing complaints and concerns

- The school will record the following details of all complaints received, onto a template (refer to Appendix B: Complaint Lodgement Form), which includes the provision for:
 - the name and contact details (with permission) of person making complaint/raising concern
 - the date the concern was expressed
 - the form in which the concern was received (e.g.: face to face, letter, telephone, email)
 - a brief description of the complaint
 - the details of the school's response
 - the action taken relating to the concern/complaint
 - any recommendations for the future
- However, when the complaint is easily resolved in a telephone call, briefer notes will be kept.
- All records of complaints received will be stored in a secure location within the school security room.
- The school will make every effort to resolve concerns and complaints before involving other levels of DET.
- The school will provide a complainant with a copy of the complaints procedure.
- The school will determine whether a concern or complaint should be managed through the school's concerns and complaints process or through other complaints processes of DET.

Timeframe

- The school will make every effort to resolve a concern or complaint as quickly as possible.
- If a complaint involves a number of students and/or a range of issues, the school will require additional time to fully investigate and resolve the complaint.
- Should the complaint involve complex issues, the school may need to take advice from the DET regional office which may take additional time. The school will then inform the complainant of the adjusted time frame and any reasons for delay. In all cases the school will try to resolve a concern or complaint within twenty working days.

Remedies

If a concern or complaint is substantiated in part or whole, the school will offer an appropriate remedy. This may include one of the following:

- an explanation of further information about the issue
- mediation, counselling or other support
- an apology, expression of regret or admission of fault
- a change of decision
- a change of policy, procedure or practice
- the cancellation of a debt or a refund.

Referral of complaints or concerns

- If a person with a concern or complaint is not satisfied with the outcome determined by the school, they should contact the Regional Office.
- The officer from the regional office will ask the complainant for a complete 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 DET Group Coordination Division.

- The Division will ask the complainant for a complete and factual account in writing of the concern and request the complainant's opinion as to why the issue was not resolved and their course of action on how the issue can be resolved.
- When the complainant is unable to provide a written account, the Group Coordination officer should act on the information provided.

Related Legislation and Policies

- [Ministerial Order No. 870](#)
- [DET Child Safety Policy`](#)
- WSC Child Safe Environment Policy
- WSC Student Code of Conduct
- WSC Bullying and Harassment Policy and Procedures

Appendices

- Appendix A: Raising Concerns and Complaints Process
- Appendix B: Complaint Lodgement Form

Evaluation

This policy will be reviewed as part of the school's three-year review cycle.

This Policy was last ratified by School Council in: 2017

APPENDIX A Raising Concerns or Complaints Process



