



Somerville Primary School

Parent Complaint Policy

Policy Name:	Parent Complaint	Date of approval:	October 2017
Responsible:	Principal	Expected review date:	October 2021

Role of the school

All schools handle parent complaints on a range of matters. Parent complaints are best addressed in an environment where parents feel able to speak up about issues concerning the education and welfare of their children. This is reflected in open, two-way communication within the school, clear roles and responsibilities for all members of the school community, realistic expectations about what can be achieved by the school and an effective, published complaints handling procedure.

Schools should treat parent concerns seriously and reflect on the issues raised through complaints to change its practice and improve the learning opportunities for its students.

The school's initial response to an incident or issue at the school is critical. It is appropriate to acknowledge what has occurred with those involved and offer an apology or expression of regret for any upset or distress they may have experienced. Those involved in the matter should be assured that the complaint will be explored and, where possible, a full explanation will be provided once the facts are known. The school should also indicate the steps it intends to take to prevent a similar incident or issue from occurring again.

The 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. See: [Creating Respectful and Safe School Communities](#)

When a school receives a complaint (either written or verbal) from a parent, schools must follow the processes outlined.

Somerville Primary School's Values

Somerville Primary School's approach to handling concerns and complaints is based on our values of:

- Providing a safe and supportive learning environment;
- Building relationships between students, parents and staff;

- Providing a safe working environment for staff.

Guiding principles

The complaint-handling process must reflect the following guiding principles, which are informed by the *Australian/New Zealand Standard – Guidelines for complaint management in organizations (AS/NZS 10002:2014)*.

Visibility	<p>Information about how and where to make a complaint, as well as how a complaint will be handled, should be regularly publicised within the school community.</p> <p>The actions taken to respond to a complaint should be well documented and include the reasons underpinning any decisions made.</p>
Accessibility	<p>Information about how to make a complaint and the school's procedures when responding to a complaint should be easily accessible. The complaint-handling process should be flexible and include the ability to make a complaint in person, by phone and in writing. Support should also be given to parents with special needs, including translations, interpreters and enabling a parent to seek the services of an advocate.</p>
Responsiveness	<p>Receipt of written complaints should be acknowledged by communicating with parents as soon as possible. Complaints should be addressed promptly and the parents kept informed of the progress of their complaint when the matter is complex and will take time to bring to resolution.</p>
Objectivity	<p>Each complaint must be treated in an equitable, objective and unbiased manner.</p>
Cost	<p>There should be no cost to the parent for access to the complaint-handling process at the school, region or central office.</p>
Protection of Privacy	<p>Personally identifiable information concerning the parent should be actively protected from disclosure except where needed in relation to the complaint. This means that the complaint should only be discussed with those directly involved in the complaint-handling process.</p>

Student-focused	The school should be open to feedback including complaints and should show a commitment to resolving complaints with the educational wellbeing of students as the first priority.
Accountability	Schools are required to have a fair, effective and efficient complaint-handling process. Schools are accountable, both internally and externally, for their decision making and complaint-handling performance. Schools need to be able to provide explanations and reasons for their decisions.
Continual Improvement	Parent complaint-handling procedures should be regularly reviewed for improvement. Complaint data and feedback should be used to identify recurrent themes and to implement improvement measures where a need is identified.

Concerns and Complaints covered by the procedures

These procedures cover concerns and complaints about:

- General issues of student behaviour that are contrary to Somerville Primary School's student engagement guidelines;
- Incidents of bullying or harassment in the classroom or the school yard;
- Learning programs, assessment and reporting of student learning;
- Communication with parents;
- School fees and payments;
- General administrative issues;
- Any other school-related matters except as detailed below.

These procedures do not cover matters for which there are existing rights of review or appeal, as detailed in the *Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide*.

Those matters include:

- Student discipline matters involving expulsions;
- Complaints about employee conduct or performance and complaints that should be dealt with by performance management, grievance resolution or disciplinary action;
- Complaints by the Department's employees related to their employment;
- Student critical incident matters;
- Other criminal matters.

Expectations

Somerville Primary 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, preferably in writing;
- 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 which must be balanced.
- Operate within applicable legislation

Somerville Primary School will address any concerns and complaints received from parents:

- Courteously;
- Efficiently;
- Fairly;
- Promptly, or within the timeline agreed with the person with the concern or complaint;
- In accordance with due process, principles of natural justice and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's regulatory framework.

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](#)

Raising Concerns or Complaints

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

- The student's teacher about learning issues and incidents that happened in their class or group;
- The deputy school leader, if students from several classes are involved;
- The principal about issues relating to school policy, school management, staff members or very complex student issues.

If you are not sure who to contact, contact the principal on 5977 5421.

Help with raising concerns or complaints

- Personal support is most appropriate in situations where the complainant and others involved in the complaint process have emotional issues related to the complaint.
- 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 support organisation who does not receive a fee for service.
- All parties involved in addressing a complaint may seek the services of a mediator when there is difficulty coming to an agreement.
- The school will ensure that the complainant is aware of these supports. A complainant who wishes to use these support services should ensure the person addressing the concern or complaint is aware of their intention and is in agreement.

Managing parent concerns and complaints information

- 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.

However, with more complex/serious complaints the following details will be recorded:

- Name and contact details 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;
- Any recommendations for future improvement in the school's policy or procedures.

Addressing concerns or complaints

- Somerville Primary School will make every effort to resolve concerns and complaints before involving other levels of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.
- Somerville Primary School will give a complainant a copy of its complaints procedures.
- Somerville Primary 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 the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.
- All complaints will be noted and acted on promptly by the staff member who receives the complaint.
- The principal, deputy school leader or delegate will investigate all complaints and will provide a response to the complainant.

- Concerns and complaints about general school matters (such as the timing of events, school policies and facilities) will be addressed by the principal or a relevant staff member.
- Somerville Primary School will make every attempt to resolve a concern or complaint as quickly as possible. If a complaint involves many students and a range of issues, the school will need more time to investigate and resolve it.

Should the complaint involve complex issues, Somerville Primary School might need to take advice from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development'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 twenty days.

Remedies

If a concern or complaint is substantiated in whole or part, Somerville Primary School will offer an appropriate remedy. For example, at its discretion and depending on the circumstances, the school might offer:

- An explanation or further information about the issue;
- Mediation, counselling or other support;
- An apology, expression of regret or admission of fault;
- To change its decision;
- To change its policies, procedures or practices;
- To cancel a debt (such as for school payments);
- A fee refund.

The school will implement the remedy as soon as practicable.

Referral of concerns or complaints

- If a person with a concern or complaint is not satisfied with the outcome determined by the school, they should contact the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's appropriate 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 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.

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 Department, 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.

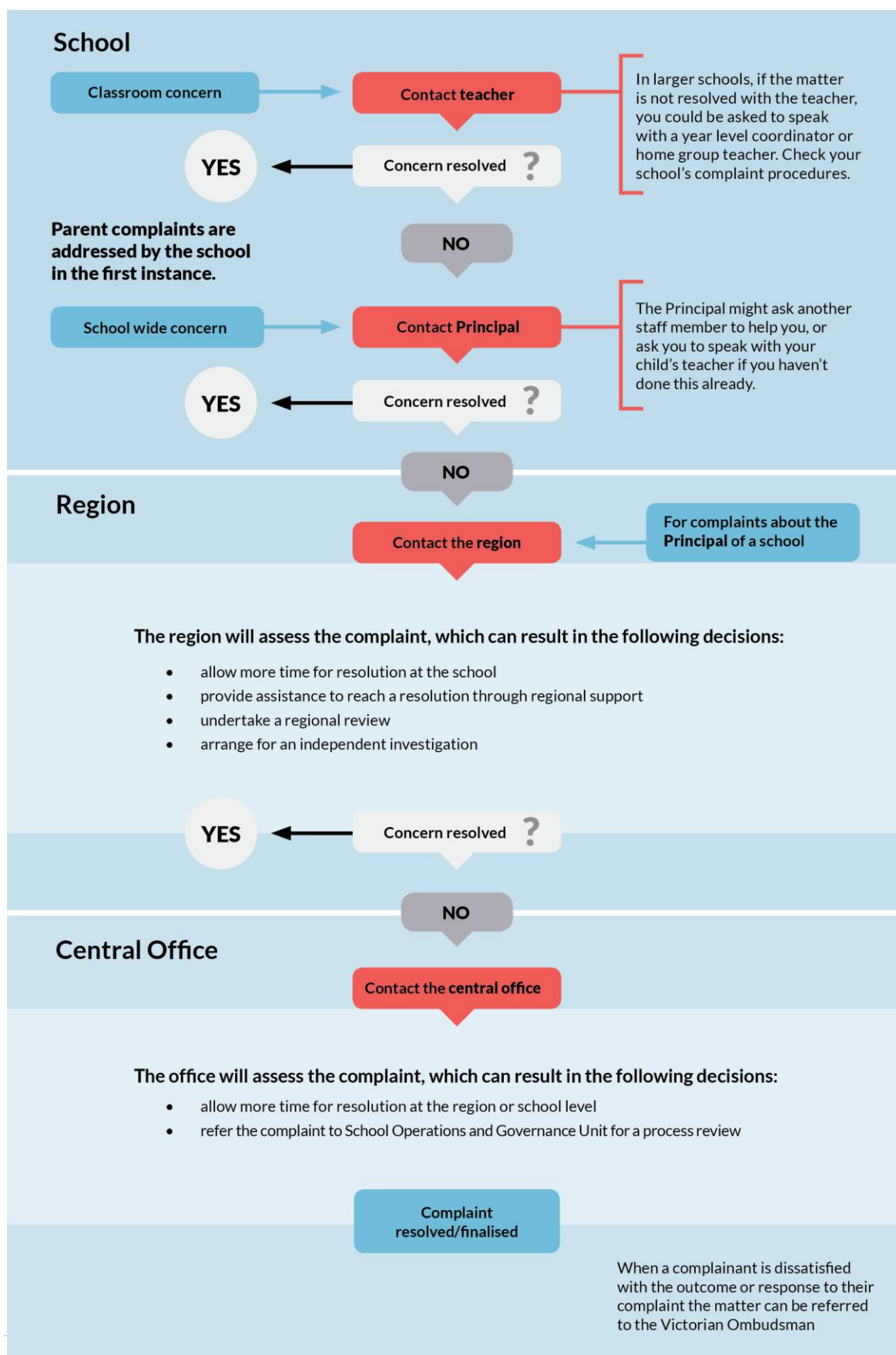
When a parent is not satisfied with the manner in which their complaint has been treated by the school, or their complaint is about the principal of the school, the parent can contact their local region. For further information, see: Role of the region

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 Department'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 Department not identified above, the complaint may be referred to the relevant level as identified in the following process image.

PARENT COMPLAINT FLOWCHART



Communication and training

Somerville Primary School's procedures for addressing concerns and complaints will be:

- School Website
- Given to a parent when their child enrolls;
- Printed in the Parent Information Book;
- Printed in the school newsletter.

Somerville Primary school will:

- Brief all members of staff (including volunteers) about its procedures to address concerns and complaints.
- Provide staff with (or provide access to) training and support appropriate to their responsibilities under the procedures

Monitoring the parent complaints policy

- Somerville Primary School will monitor parent concerns and complaints and consider issues raised through the parent complaints process.
- Somerville Primary School Council will regularly review its policy and procedures to effectively address parent concerns and complaints as part of its cyclic policy and procedures review schedule.

EVALUATION: This policy will be reviewed as part of the school's three-year review cycle, or after any significant incident.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES: Please refer to the Department of Education and Early Childhood website for the comprehensive guide: Addressing parents' concerns and complaints effectively: policy and guidelines found at:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/spag/community/policyparentsconcerns.pdf>

Regional Telephone Number: 8765 5600