



DISTANCE EDUCATION CENTRE VICTORIA

RAISING CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURES



This policy and its associated procedures are designed to ensure that when concerns and complaints are raised the focus of the process and outcome is in the best interest of students.

This policy highlights that concerns and complaints are best addressed by students, parents, teachers, principals and support staff working in partnership.

This policy recognises that stakeholders in this process have different roles and responsibilities in achieving the outcome that is in the best interest of the students and that respect for those different roles and perspectives is essential.

Effective from: 13 September 2011

The school's values

The 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; and
- providing a safe working environment for staff.

Terminology

<i>Complaint</i>	An expression of a grievance or resentment where the complainant is seeking redress or justice.
<i>Complainant</i>	The person raising the concern or complaint. A parent or student or other stakeholder may be a complainant
<i>Concern</i>	An issue of interest that is raised informally to improve or change a situation.
<i>DECV</i>	Distance Education Centre Victoria
<i>Department</i>	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
<i>Parent</i>	In relation to a child, includes a guardian and every person who has parental responsibility for the child including parental responsibility under the <i>Family Law Act 1975</i> and any person with whom a child normally resides.

Concerns and complaints covered by these procedures

These procedures cover concerns and complaints about:

- general issues of student behaviour;
- incidents of bullying or harassment;
- learning programs, assessment and reporting of student learning;
- communication with parents;
- school fees and payments;
- general administrative issues; or
- 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. 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; or
- other criminal matters.

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; and
- recognise that all parties have rights and responsibilities which must be balanced.

The 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; and
- in accordance with due process, principles of natural justice and the Department's regulatory framework.

The complaints procedure

Before raising a concern or complaint it is recommended that parents:

- be clear about the topic or issue they wish to raise;
- be aware that they may not have all the facts relating to the circumstances surrounding the topic or issue they wish to discuss;
- think about what an acceptable outcome would be for them and their child; and
- remain calm.

The Department has more detailed information on how to best raise your concern or complaint available on its website at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/pcschools.htm>.

Raising concerns or complaints

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

To raise an issue the complainant can telephone, visit, email or write to:

- the student's teacher about learning issues and incidents that happened while at the DECV campus or during a DECV excursion
- the year level coordinator if several classes are involved
- the Business Manager about issues relating to administration including mail
- 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.

For contact details of relevant staff members, including Year Level Coordinators and Principal Class, call reception on (03) 8480 0000 or 1800 133 511.

Complaints can be made anonymously. However, it may not be possible to investigate matters thoroughly without the ability to maintain effective liaison with the complainant.

Help with raising concerns or complaints

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, with the agreement of all parties, when there is difficulty coming to an agreement.

A translation service may also be needed from time to time.

Managing parent concerns and complaints information

The DECV records the following details of all complaints received, even if the complaint appears to be minor:

- 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 officer responding to the concern or complaint;
- action taken on the concern or complaint;
- the outcome of action taken on the concern or complaint; and
- any recommendations for future improvement in the school's policy or procedures.

Details of a complaint are recorded in the DECV's concerns and complaints database.

In the first instance, when the complaint is easily resolved in a telephone call, a brief note in the DECV's database recording the issue and the resolution may be all that is required.

Addressing concerns or complaints

The school will make every effort to resolve concerns and complaints before involving other levels of the Department.

The school will give a complainant a copy of its complaints procedures.

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 the Department.

All complaints will be noted and acted on promptly by the staff member who receives the complaint. The school will make every attempt to resolve a concern or complaint as quickly as possible. If the complaint involves many students and a range of issues, the school will need more time to investigate and resolve it.

The school will acknowledge all complaints made in writing. It will provide the complainant with a timeline for investigating the complaint.

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.

Remedies

If a concern or complaint is substantiated in whole or part, the DECV will offer an appropriate remedy. For example, at its discretion and depending on the circumstances, the DECV 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); or
- a fee refund.

The DECV will implement the remedy as soon as practical.

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's Northern Metropolitan Regional Office:

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
Northern Metropolitan Regional Office
PO Box 2001
COBURG VIC 3058

Phone: (03) 9488 9488
Fax: (03) 9488 9400

The contact officer is: Manager, Community Relations

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. The Department's *Complaint Lodgement Form* is available on the Department website (<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/pcschools.htm>).

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 DECV's procedures for addressing concerns and complaints are available to parents and the school community on the DECV website (www.distance.vic.edu.au) and in the Enrolment handbook. A copy can also be provided by email or post, upon request.

The school will:

- brief all members of staff about its procedures to address concerns and complaints annually;
- provide staff with (or provide access to) training and support appropriate to their responsibilities under the procedures; and
- 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*.

Monitoring the parent complaints policy

The DECV will monitor parent concerns and complaints and consider issues raised through the parent complaints process, and any other relevant information from the parent opinion survey, when undertaking a review of the school's policies, procedures and operations.

The 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.

The DECV 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; and
- use information provided to the DECV to continuously improve its delivery of education to students.