Introduction

This publication contains: the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development’s (the Department) policy and procedures for addressing parent concerns and complaints (including advice for schools to develop their own concerns and complaints procedures) and fourteen guides that provide practical advice for principals, teachers and other educational personnel about issues to consider when implementing the Department’s policy and a school’s procedures on managing complaints.

Section A:
About the policy and guides

The policy and guides were developed in response to a 2005 review by Ombudsman Victoria of the then Department of Education and Training’s handling of parent complaints. The Ombudsman recommended that the Department ‘review its guidelines for managing complaints in schools and regional offices to ensure a balance between the rights of complainants and officers’.

The policy and guides support the Department’s objective of strengthening the quality of its service delivery and responsiveness to the community. The Department uses the information provided through its concerns and complaints procedures as an opportunity for continuous improvement of its services and performance.

Aims

As a result of implementing the policy, the Office for Government School Education, its central divisions, regional offices and schools will have procedures in place to address concerns and complaints promptly, consistently and fairly.

The guides will assist Department staff to confidently address the concerns and complaints of parents about their child’s education.

About parents’ concerns and complaints

Parents’ concerns and complaints most commonly relate to:

• the management of an incident between students at a school
• the educational or other progress of their child
• the development and implementation of school and general education policy.

‘Parent’ in the policy has the same meaning as in the Education and Training Reform Act 2006, which is:

‘parent’, in relation to a child, includes a guardian and every person who has parental responsibility for the child including parental responsibility under the Family Law Act 1975 of the Commonwealth and any person with whom a child normally or regularly resides.

For the purposes of the policy:

• a ‘concern’ is an issue of interest (because of its importance and effect) which is raised informally in order to improve or change a situation. For example:

  I believe that the school’s physical education policy and program is inadequate. I don’t think that it caters for students who have well-developed skills and who need to be involved in competitive sport. I think the school should review its policy in this area.

• a ‘complaint’ is an expression of grievance or resentment where the complainant is seeking redress or justice. For example:

  My daughter has been left out of the school’s netball team for the third time in a row. She is an accomplished netballer and deserves to be part of the team. It is not fair that she is left out and I want you to do something about it!
Applicability
This policy applies to the Office for Government School Education, including its divisions, regional offices and schools.

The policy does not apply to matters about which there are existing rights of (and processes for) review or appeal. If, at any stage, it becomes apparent that the concern or complaint relates to such matters, the relevant procedures should be implemented immediately.

This policy is not applicable where a complainant has employed another party to represent them, such as a solicitor. In these circumstances, the concern or complaint should be referred to the Department's Legal Services Branch for their assessment. However a complainant is entitled to an advocate who can be a friend or colleague or a person provided through an appropriate support agency who does not receive a fee for service.

Policy framework

Legislative and regulatory framework
All concerns and complaints must be addressed in line with the Department's legislative and regulatory framework, which includes the:

- Education and Training Reform Act 2006
- Education and Training Reform Regulations 2007
- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006
- Information Privacy Act 2000

Dignity and respect statement
Concerns and complaints must be addressed in line with the Department's 2006 Dignity and Respect Statement. The statement says that:

- The Department is committed to providing safe and supportive work environments where diversity is valued and everyone is treated with respect, fairness and dignity.
- Discrimination, sexual and other forms of harassment, bullying, violence and threatening behaviour are unacceptable.
- All employees, students, parents and visitors in schools and other Departmental workplaces are expected to act accordingly.
- The Department (which includes schools) and school councils, will act to ensure that the safety, security, health and wellbeing of all employees, students, parents and visitors in schools and other Departmental workplaces are protected.

Code of conduct for Victorian teachers and public sector employees
All staff must observe the code of conduct for the Victorian teaching profession or public sector employees. The codes can be found on the following sites:

- Victorian Teaching Profession Code of Conduct
  www.vit.vic.edu.au
- Code of Conduct for Victorian Public Sector Employees
  www.ssa.vic.gov.au
Section B: Concerns and complaints policy

Expectations

Concerns and complaints are best addressed by students, parents, teachers, principals and support staff working in partnership.

The Department expects that all parties will, when addressing concerns and complaints:

- maintain the confidentiality of all parties, in line with Departmental policy and legislative requirements
- acknowledge that their 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.

Principals should ensure that parents are aware of their right to advocacy when communicating the issues involved in their complaint and in negotiating an outcome. Refer to the parent complaints website:

www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/parentcomplaint.htm

In addition to the expectations of all parties above, the Department will address complaints:

- courteously
- efficiently
- fairly
- promptly, within timelines agreed with the person with the concern or complaint (where possible concerns or complaints should be addressed within 20 school days)
- in accordance with due process and where appropriate, the principles of natural justice and the Department’s regulatory framework.
Concern or complaint management process

Figure 1 shows the process by which a concern or complaint made to a school by a parent about any aspect of their child’s education will be addressed.

Parent concern or complaint

A parent can raise a concern or complaint about any aspect of a school’s operations. In the first instance, they should take a concern or make a complaint to the school. Any complaint raised with the regional or central office that has not been raised at the school level will be referred to the school for resolution (unless there are special circumstances which prevent the school from managing the complaint).

School principal determines appropriate complaint procedure

Concerns and complaints relating to a school are most effectively addressed by the school. A school must make every effort to resolve a concern or complaint related to it before involving other levels of the Department.

After due consideration of the issues raised by the complainant a school principal is to determine the most appropriate way to address a concern or complaint, either by:

- using the school’s general concerns and complaints procedures, or
- as outlined under legislated and other complaints processes (see page 7).

Also see the Human Resources website at:
School's policy and procedures to address concerns and complaints

In line with Departmental policy, the Department requires a school to:

• develop policy and procedures to address concerns and complaints, in collaboration with parents and the school community, that respond to the nature and complexity of the concern or complaint
• regularly make information about its procedures readily available to its community, in clear and easy-to-understand language and, where appropriate, in a range of community languages and in formats that are accessible to everyone so that no-one is disadvantaged
• review its policy and procedures as part of the school council's cyclic policy and procedures review schedule.

A school's policy and procedures to address concerns and complaints should be based on the advice provided in Section C and include all the categories of information as described. This will help ensure that the school's procedures are consistent with Departmental policy.

A school must ensure that it has systems and processes in place to implement its policy and procedures in addressing concerns and complaints.

A school is to ensure a complainant is aware of its local policy and procedures to address concerns and complaints and the Department's complaints process. When necessary, information should be provided to the complainant as soon as possible after their concern or complaint is raised.
Legislated and other complaints processes

This policy does not apply to matters where there are existing legislated rights of review or appeal. These matters must be managed in line with the procedures and processes detailed in the Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide and on the Department’s Human Resources website. These matters include:

• student expulsions
• complaints about staff that if upheld would constitute misconduct
• complaints by the Department’s employees related to their employment
• complaints about an employee’s conduct or performance grievance or action under Division 9A or Division 10 of the Education and Training Reform Act 2006
• student critical incident matters
• other criminal matters.


Regional office support for complex complaints

Each regional director will ensure the regional office has procedures to address complaints which reflect the Department’s policy. Regional offices are to:

• support schools to develop policies and procedures to address concerns and complaints in line with the Department’s policy
• ensure that, wherever possible, a school resolves concerns and complaints related to it
• ensure that training in complaints management is offered to regional office and school staff, including school councillors and other non-department employees.

If a school is unable to resolve a complaint, it can contact the regional office for support from the community liaison officer, assistant regional director or other officers as appropriate.

Complex complaints are those that:

• defy resolution over a long period of time
• involve complex issues (including issues involving more than one school)
• may include complaints about the principal of a school.

Escalating to the regional office

If a parent with a concern or complaint is not satisfied with the outcome determined by the school, they can contact the appropriate regional office. Depending on the nature and complexity of the concern or complaint, the regional director may involve the assistant regional director, the community liaison officer or other officers in the resolution of the issue.

Where relevant, the officer will ask the complainant for a complete and factual account in writing of the concern or complaint and the complainant’s opinion about why they believe the school did not resolve the issue to their satisfaction. Where the complainant is unable to provide a written account the officer should act on the information provided verbally.

Regional office staff will respond promptly to complaints received and, where appropriate, immediately acknowledge, in writing, the receipt of a written complaint. They will, as far as possible, attempt to resolve the issue raised by the complainant and provide a final response within 20 school days.
Escalating to central office – Deputy Secretary, Office for Government School Education

If the complaint cannot be resolved by the complainant, school and regional office working together, the regional office or the complainant may refer the complaint to the Deputy Secretary, Office for Government School Education, as per advice provided on the Department’s parent complaints website at: www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/parentcomplaint.htm

If a complaint has not already been raised with the school or regional office prior to its receipt at central office, it will be referred to the relevant regional office for investigation and resolution.

When a complainant registers a complaint with the Deputy Secretary, Office for Government School Education, the complainant will be asked to state in writing why they consider the complaint was not resolved. The complainant will also be asked to outline a realistic course of action to resolve the complaint.

If the complaint raises complex issues, the Deputy Secretary may determine that its resolution requires an independent review undertaken by an external agency.

If the complaint remains unresolved after all the Department’s processes have been implemented, the Deputy Secretary may refer the complainant to an external agency, such as Ombudsman Victoria, for investigation.

Group Coordination Division review of unresolved complaints

The Group Coordination Division, on behalf of the Deputy Secretary, Office for Government School Education, will review unresolved complaints that:

- are exceptionally complex
- relate to broader Victorian Government policy issues.

Outcomes

The school is to communicate the outcomes of concerns and complaints to all parties involved, taking into account any relevant privacy requirements.

When attempting to resolve complaints, schools and regional offices can make use of the services provided by the Dispute Settlement Centre Victoria, which provides a free mediation service. Further information is available at: www.justice.vic.gov.au/disputes/
Complaint resolved
A complaint is considered to be resolved when the complainant and the Department (school, regional office or central office) agree on an appropriate response or remedy.

Possible responses and remedies include:

• an explanation
• an acknowledgement of each other’s perspective and agreement on ways to manage differences
• an apology or expression of regret
• an admission of fault
• a change of decision
• a change of policy, procedure or practice
• agreement on what constitutes acceptable behaviour
• an undertaking that unacceptable behaviour will change
• the waiving of debt related to school fees and payments
• a refund of parent payments
• the provision of counselling or other support.

Remedies should be implemented as soon as possible.

Complaint dismissed
A complaint can only be dismissed:

• after it has been investigated
• if an investigation has determined that the complaint cannot be substantiated.

Complaint unresolved
A complaint is considered to be unresolved if the complainant does not agree on a course of action and/or a remedy, or if the remedy cannot be implemented. In such cases, a school must involve its regional office to assist in resolving the complaint.

If the complaint raises complex issues which are unable to be resolved by the regional office, Group Coordination Division may, on behalf of the Deputy Secretary, Office for Government School Education, determine that an independant investigation is required.

It may not always be possible to fully resolve all complaints to the complainant’s satisfaction. This could happen if the complainant has unrealistic expectations about the outcome of their complaint, or if the Department’s policies or regulations are contrary to their views.

If the complaint remains unresolved at the completion of all the Department’s procedures, or if the complainant is dissatisfied with the manner in which the complaint was handled by the Department, the Department may inform the complainant of options for review by an external agency such as Ombudsman Victoria.
Anonymous complaints

The Department requires all complaints to be investigated. However, it recognises that its staff might not be able to fully investigate a complaint if they cannot effectively liaise with the complainant. Furthermore, anonymous complaints raise natural justice issues for respondents who have a right to know the particulars of the allegations made against them.

The school principal, regional director or general manager, Group Coordination Division, should determine the extent to which an anonymous complaint received by the school, region or central office shall be investigated. Where the complaint is about the principal of a school the decision to investigate the complaint shall be made by the regional director.

Unreasonable complainant conduct

Unreasonable complainant conduct is behaviour that:

- is clearly and significantly outside the expectations of confidentiality, cooperation, courtesy and respect
- calls for staff resources and time unjustified by the nature or significance of the complaint
- is vexatious (that is, an action or complaint that is brought without merit, often to cause annoyance to another person)
- is oriented towards conflict.

Refer to Unreasonable complainant conduct: interim practice manual at:
www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au

The school principal, regional director or the general manager, Group Coordination Division can determine if a complainant's conduct is unreasonable. If so determined, they will:

- develop a plan to address the complaint and the complainant's interaction with the Department
- inform the complainant of the plan
- ensure all Departmental officers adhere to the plan as closely as practicable.

When a complainant uses threatening or violent behaviour all Departmental employees should follow the Occupational Violence Policy, available from the Human Resources website at:

Additional information can also be obtained from the Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide, section 6.16.11: Options for dealing with trespassers and violence in schools.
Communicating and monitoring the parent complaints policy

Schools

Communication
Each school should make information about both the Department’s policy and procedures for addressing concerns and complaints and its own local procedures readily available to the school community. All information must be in clear and easy-to-understand language and, where appropriate in a range of community languages, and in formats that are accessible to everyone, so that no-one is disadvantaged. Information should include:

- expectations of a person making a complaint
- how a person can make a complaint
- information to be provided by the person
- who the person should contact and their contact details
- the process and timeframe for addressing complaints.

The school should brief all members of staff (including volunteers) about its concerns and complaints procedures annually. It must also provide staff with access to training and support materials appropriate to their responsibilities under the procedures.

The school should ensure parent complaints are addressed promptly, within agreed timelines where possible. The length of time may vary according to the complexity of the complaint, however, in most cases the school should attempt to resolve parent concerns or complaints within 20 school days. The school will communicate to the complainant any reasons for a delay in addressing their complaint.

Schools are required to administer the Department’s annual parent opinion survey that includes the statement ‘I know how to make a complaint’. Schools should use the results from the survey when reflecting on the school’s communication strategy.

Monitoring
The school should establish and maintain a system to record and monitor complaints and their resolution.

The school should consider recording 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
- any recommendations for future improvement in the school’s policy or procedures.
However, in the first instance, 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.

The school should 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 should regularly review its policy and procedures to effectively address parent concerns and complaints as part of its cyclic policy and procedures review schedule.

**Regional offices**

**Communication**

Each regional office is to have information about policy and procedures to address concerns and complaints on its website, with a link to the Department’s parent complaints website. Information should include:

- how a person can make a complaint
- expectations of all parties involved in resolving a complaint
- information to be provided by the person
- who the person should contact and their contact details
- the process and timeframe for addressing complaints.

The regional office is to ensure staff members have access to training about responding to and addressing concerns and complaints. Training opportunities should be provided to regional and school personnel including school councillors and other non-departmental employees as required.

The regional office should also brief all regional office staff about its policy and procedures to address concerns and complaints annually. Briefings for new staff should be included as part of their induction program.

The region should ensure parent complaints are addressed promptly, within agreed timelines where possible. The length of time may vary according to the complexity of the complaint, however, in most cases the region should attempt to resolve parent concerns or complaints, in consultation with the school, within 20 school days. The region will communicate to the complainant any reasons for a delay in addressing their complaint.

**Monitoring**

The regional office should maintain appropriate details of parent complaints addressed by the office and use information from the complaints it has managed to identify common or recurring issues that may need to be addressed within the region.
Central office

Communication
The Group Coordination Division on behalf of the Deputy Secretary, Office for Government School Education:
• communicates the Department’s parent concerns and complaints policy and procedures to principals and regional directors
• develops and provides support materials for schools to use in addressing parent concerns and complaints
• ensures appropriate training is provided to central officers involved in the complaints management process
• assists complainants in the complaints process by publishing information about the Department’s complaints policy and procedures on the parent complaints website. The website information will include:
  - what a parent with a complaint may expect and is entitled to
  - how a parent can make a complaint
  - the responsibilities of, and expectations made, of the person making the complaint
  - information to be provided by the parent
  - who the parent should contact and their contact details
  - the process for addressing complaints
  - the timeframe for addressing complaints
  - access to the Department’s policy and guides.

The Division has produced an easy-to-understand brochure for parents outlining its whole-of-Department complaints management process. Schools can access copies of the brochure from the Department website at:
www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/parentcomplaint.htm

The brochure is produced in a number of community languages.

The Group Coordination Division on behalf of the Deputy Secretary, Office for the Government School Education will ensure parent complaints referred to the office are addressed promptly, within agreed timelines where possible. The length of time may vary according to the complexity of the complaint, however, in most cases the Group Coordination Division will attempt to resolve parent concerns or complaints, in consultation with the relevant regional office, within 20 school days. The central office will communicate to the complainant any reasons for a delay in addressing their complaint.

Monitoring
The Group Coordination Division will maintain information concerning parent complaints addressed by the Office for Government School Education and use the information to identify common or recurring issues and, where necessary, implement improvements to the Department’s policy and procedures.
Summary of roles and responsibilities

School

- Develops, publicises and implements its policy and procedures to effectively address parent concerns and complaints.
- Ensures all reasonable steps have been undertaken in resolving parent concerns and complaints.
- Maintains the confidentiality of all parties and observes the principles of natural justice.
- Contacts the regional office for support with any complex complaints.
- Communicates the outcomes of concerns and complaints, where possible, to all relevant parties.
- Communicates its policy and procedures clearly and regularly to parents and the school community.
- Ensures all new staff members are aware of the school and Department’s policies and procedures in relation to addressing parent concerns and complaints.
- Briefs all staff members (including volunteers) on the policy and procedures annually.
- Provides staff with (or provides access to) training and support appropriate to their responsibilities under the procedures.
- Establishes and maintains administrative processes to manage concerns and complaints raised at the school.
- Ensures that its policy and procedures are consistent with the Department’s policy.
- Regularly reviews its record of complaints to identify common or recurring issues that may need to be addressed.
- Modifies other school policies and procedures as required as a result of addressing concerns and complaints.
- Ensures that all parties in a disputed complaint are aware of their entitlement to support through an advocate. An advocate can be a friend or colleague or an unpaid support person provided through an appropriate agency.
- Reflects on the personal attributes necessary for staff selected to manage concerns and complaints (see Good Practice Guide: Ombudsman Victoria’s guide to complaint handling for Victorian public sector agencies).

Teacher and home group teacher: usually best placed to resolve concerns and complaints relating to student learning and specific student incidents in the teacher’s class or group.

Year level coordinator: provides support when students from other classes are involved.

Assistant principal: usually best placed to resolve concerns and complaints relating to staff members or complex student issues.

Principal: usually best placed to resolve concerns and complaints relating to school policy, school management, staff members or complex student issues.
Regional office

- Ensures whenever possible that a school resolves concerns and complaints related to it.
- Ensures that regional and school policy and procedures are in line with the Department’s policy.
- Supports schools to resolve complex complaints.
- Ensures regional and school personnel have access to appropriate training and support to address parent concerns and complaints.
- Briefs all regional staff on the policy and procedures to address parent concerns and complaints annually.
- Reviews information on complaints it has managed to identify common or recurring issues that may need to be addressed.
- Reflects on the personal attributes necessary for staff selected to manage concerns and complaints (see Good Practice Guide: Ombudsman Victoria’s guide to complaint handling for Victorian public sector agencies).

Community liaison officer: usually acts as an initial contact for concerns and complaints for the regional office and provides support to schools to address concerns and complaints.

Assistant regional director: usually manages how the regional office will address complex concerns and complaints made to the office.

Regional director: ensures schools’ concerns and complaints procedures comply with Department policy and provides advice to schools.

Office for Government School Education-Group Coordination Division

- Develops departmental policy and guides on addressing parent concerns and complaints.
- Disseminates and provides advice to the community about the Department’s policy on addressing parent concerns and complaints.
- Communicates the Department’s policy to principals and regional directors.
- Ensures whenever possible that a school resolves concerns and complaints related to it, with the assistance of the regional office if necessary.
- Reviews the management and outcomes of specific complaints where appropriate. This may involve assisting regional offices with exceptionally complex complaints or complaints that relate to broader departmental or government policy issues.
- Appoints appropriate persons to undertake independent reviews of complex complaints where required.
- Regularly reviews information on complaints it has managed to identify and, where necessary, implement improvements to the Department’s policy and procedures.
- Reflects on the personal attributes necessary for staff selected to manage concerns and complaints (see Good Practice Guide: Ombudsman Victoria’s guide to complaint handling for Victorian public sector agencies).
The Department requires all schools to develop a policy and develop and implement procedures to effectively address parents’ concerns and complaints.

Section C: Advice for schools when developing concerns and complaints policy and procedures

School level policy and procedures are to be:

- developed and reviewed in consultation with the school community
- approved by school council
- widely promoted within the school community.

This section contains advice that schools should use when developing their procedures, based on the requirements in Ombudsman Victoria’s Complaint handling guide for the Victorian public sector.¹

The advice includes:

- an introduction explaining the required content for each point
- information which restates the Department’s policy
- suggested text which a school can adapt to meet the particular circumstances and requirements of the school and its community.

A template that schools can use when developing their policy and procedures is available at: www.education.gov.au/about/contact/parent complaint.htm

It is suggested that the following areas are included.

Title

Involve the school community when deciding on a title for the procedures. For example, a working title might be:

*Raising concerns and complaints*

The school’s values

Briefly summarise relevant school values as they relate to addressing parent concerns and complaints. For example:

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
- providing a safe working environment for staff.

Concerns and complaints covered by the procedures

List the types of concerns and complaints covered by the procedures. For example:

These procedures cover concerns and complaints about:

- general issues of student behaviour that are contrary to the school’s code of conduct
- 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.

Include the Department's policy about the scope of a school's procedures to address concerns and complaints. For example:

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.

**Ownership and scope**

Include the Department's policy about how procedures to address concerns and complaints will be developed. For example:

The school will develop its procedures to address concerns and complaints in collaboration with parents and the school community.

Include information about any other complaints processes the school has, in addition to these procedures. For example, the school might develop and publicise complaints procedures for a specific area of operations that often attracts concerns or complaints, such as a primary school's placement of students in classes for the coming year. In that case, the school's procedures would include an explanation of how students will be placed and how the school will report the outcome to parents.

State the date from which the procedures take effect. For example:

These procedures take effect from 1 January 2009.

**Expectations**

State the school's expectations of the parent with a concern or complaint, and their responsibilities. For example:

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
- recognise that all parties have rights and responsibilities which must be balanced.
Include the Department’s expectations of the school when addressing concerns and complaints. For example:

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
• in accordance with due process, principles of natural justice and the Department’s regulatory framework.

**Raising concerns or complaints**

Include the Department’s policy for addressing concerns and complaints. For example:

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

Specify the form in which a concern or complaint should be made and to whom it should be made. For example:

The complainant should telephone, visit or write to:

• the student's teacher or home group teacher about learning issues and incidents that happened in their class or group
• the year level coordinator if students from several classes are involved
• 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 for any staff member, call the office on (insert telephone number).

Provide a contact point for complainants who are unsure about the person they should contact in the first instance. For example:

If you are not sure who to contact, contact the Assistant Principal on (insert telephone number).

**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.

Describe the resources available to students, parents, teachers and support staff involved in addressing a concern or complaint. For example:

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

Include the Department's policy about detailing concerns and complaints. For example:

The school should consider recording 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
- any recommendations for future improvement in the school's policy or procedures.

However, in the first instance, 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.

Describe the process by which the school will record concerns or complaints.

Addressing concerns or complaints

Include the Department's policy for addressing concerns and complaints. For example:

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.

Describe the process by which the school will handle the concern or complaint. For example:

All complaints will be noted and acted on promptly by the staff member who receives the complaint.

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

The assistant principal 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.

State the timeframes within which the school will handle complaints. For example:

The school will make every attempt to resolve a concern or complaint as quickly as possible. If your complaint involves many students and a range of issues, the school will need more time to investigate and resolve it.
Include the Department's policy about timelines for complaints that escalate beyond school level. For example:

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**

Explain the types of remedies the school would consider if it accepts a concern or complaint is justified, and when the remedy will be implemented. For example:

If a concern or complaint is substantiated in whole or part, the 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**

Include the Department's policy for referral of a complaint. For example:

If a person with a concern or complaint is not satisfied with the outcome determined by the school, they should contact the Department'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 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**

Include the Department's policy about communicating to parents and the school community. For example:

The school will make information about procedures for addressing concerns and complaints readily available to parents and the school community, in clear and easy-to-understand language and, where appropriate, in a range of community languages and formats that are accessible to everyone so that no-one is disadvantaged.
Include the information the Department expects a school to communicate:

The information will include:

- how a person can make a complaint
- the person’s responsibilities
- information to be provided by the person
- who the person should contact and their contact details
- the process and timeframes for managing complaints.

Indicate how the school will communicate its complaints procedures to parents and the school community. For example:

The school’s procedures for addressing concerns and complaints will be:

- published on the school’s website
- printed in a leaflet given to a parent when their child enrols
- printed in the parent’s handbook
- printed in the school newsletter
- publicised on a poster displayed in public areas of the school.

Include a statement about training and support. For example:

The school will:

- brief all members of staff (including volunteers) 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
- 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

Include a statement about how the school will monitor its policy and procedures. For example:

The school 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.

State how and when the school will review its reports of complaints and what the outcomes of reviews will be. For example:

The school 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
- use information provided to the school through the parent opinion survey on the views of parents.