

# RAISING CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS

**Rationale:** Wallan Secondary College encourages all members of the school community to attempt to resolve complaints and concerns at the school level.

Complaints procedures exist to provide an avenue to address concerns or problems that may exist between the College and a College community member.

The School's approach to handling concerns and complaints is based on our values of providing a safe and supportive environment for our students to learn, building relationships between students, parents and staff and ensuring a safe working environment for our staff at all times.

**Aims:** This policy is developed to ensure that all complaints will be treated confidentially, fairly, consistently and resolved as speedily as possible.

Any member of the school community who raises an issue of discrimination, harassment, bullying or vilification in good faith will not be victimized or otherwise unfairly treated or disadvantaged.

All complaints will be taken seriously, investigated and acted upon as quickly as possible.

Every student and staff member at Wallan Secondary College should feel welcome, safe and supported emotionally and physically whilst on College grounds or carry out duties required of them in their employment or education.

The wellbeing of all of our community; staff and students is a priority for Wallan Secondary College.

## Concerns and Complaints

Concerns and complaints may include, but are not limited to:

- 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.

For more information, see [www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/www/html/93-complaint-handling-guide-for-the-victorian-public-sector.asp](http://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/www/html/93-complaint-handling-guide-for-the-victorian-public-sector.asp)

## The process for raising concerns or complaints

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

- All concerns should be raised with the school. This is best done in writing to the College Principal, so there is an accurate record of the date and the issue to be considered. If the complainant is unable to record their complaint, they can direct their phone call to the Assistant Principal, in which assistance will be provided to record the concern.

Complainants can seek advice 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 or reward for service.

All parties involved in addressing a complaint may seek the services of a mediator when there is difficulty coming to an agreement.

## Working to resolve a complaint

In resolving any complaint the Principal or Principal's delegate may choose to allocate the task of resolving a complaint to one of a number of staff members. This may include but is not exclusive of:

- Classroom Teacher usually best placed to resolve concerns and complaints relating to student learning and specific student incidents in a classroom situation.
- Year Level Leader: will provide support and guidance when students from other classes are involved.
- Assistant Principal: about issues relating to staff members or complex student issues.
- Principal: about issues relating to school policy, school management, staff members or complex student issues.

For contact details of the appropriate staff members please contact our office on 5783 0300.

When managing a parent concern or complaint the College will consider and need to record the following details:

- 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.

## Complaint resolution

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 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.

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.

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.

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 or further information about the issue
- mediation, counselling or other support
- an acknowledgement of each other's perspective and agreement on ways to manage differences
- an apology, expression of regret or admission of fault
- a change of decision
- a change of College policy, procedures or practices
- agreement on what constitutes acceptable behaviour in the College community.
- an undertaking that unacceptable behaviour will change
- the waiving of debt related to school fees and payments
- a refund of parent payments

A complaint can only be dismissed:

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

### **The role of the DET Regional Office**

If a parent with a concern or complaint is not satisfied with the outcome determined by the College, they can contact the appropriate DET 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 as relevant to resolve the complaint.

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 College 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.

### **Monitoring the complaints policy**

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.

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.

Date of next review: March 2020

This policy was ratified by the Wallan Secondary College Council on...

10<sup>th</sup> May 2016

Wallan Secondary College is committed to the protection and wellbeing of all students whilst participating in school activities both during and outside school hours. Staff have responsibility for building and maintaining a child safe environment. This responsibility extends to the identification and timely response to all concerns with regard the safety of any student of our College.

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