Parent Concerns and Complaints Policy

DATE RATIFIED: September 2012

RATIONALE

Essendon North Primary School’s values are:

- **Integrity** – acting ethically and fairly at all times, ensuring consistency between words and actions.
- **Honesty** – always being truthful, fair and true to oneself and others
- **Cooperation** – working together, communicating effectively and supporting each other in a positive manner
- **Respect** – treating others with consideration, being courteous at all times and acknowledging the beliefs and rights of others
- **Responsibility** – taking ownership of our behavior and actions and setting a positive example for others

These school values provide the framework to ensure high standards of conduct are maintained between staff, parents and students. The school acknowledges its responsibility to manage and resolve parent complaints fairly and efficiently, and in accordance with relative state-wide legislation.

The school is committed to implementing procedures that cover concerns and complaints about:

- General issues of student behaviour that are contrary to the school’s student engagement policy
- Incidents of bullying or harassment
- Learning programs, and assessment and reporting of student learning
- Communication with parents
- School levies and payments
- General administrative issues
- Any other school related matter

The school will make information for addressing concerns and complaints readily available to parents and the school community in clear and easy-to-understand language. The information will include:

- How a person can make a complaint
- The person's responsibilities
- The information required when making a complaint
- Who the person should contact and their contact details
- The process for managing complaints.
Information on the school's procedures for addressing concerns and complaints will be:

- Published on the school's website
- Printed in the prep handbook
- A summary will be printed in the school newsletter

**PURPOSE**
The purpose of this policy is to provide a framework for parents to effectively raise issues with the school in order to:

- Provide a harmonious, positive and productive school environment
- Provide a supportive school culture
- Build positive relationships between students, parents and staff
- Provide a safe working environment for staff
- Promote home-school partnerships.

**IMPLEMENTATION**

1. **Processes**

   a. **Expectations of parent/guardian raising the concern or complaint**

   As soon as possible after an issue occurs, a parent/guardian raising a concern or complaint should:

   - Speak to the teacher/staff member concerned
   - Provide complete and factual information about the concern or complaint
   - Maintain and respect the privacy and confidentiality of all parties
   - Acknowledge the common goal 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 the difference, avoiding blaming or making judgment
   - Recognise that all parties have rights and responsibilities that must be balanced.

   b. **Raising concerns or complaints:**

   The complainant should contact the following for dealing with complaints

   **Level 1 Classroom teacher**

   - Concerns or complaints about general classroom matters should be referred to the relevant classroom teacher or relevant staff member.
   - Initially visit, telephone or write to the student's teacher about learning issues
and incidents that happened in their child’s class or group.

Level 2 Department Leaders

- Visit, telephone or write to the department leaders: P-2 and 3-6, if students from several classes are involved or if the concern or complaint is of a more serious or confidential nature.

Level 3 Assistant Principal or Principal

- Concerns and complaints about general school matters, including policies, facilities, staffing etc and unresolved matters previously dealt with at a classroom level should be referred to the Principal.
- Contact the Principal or the Assistant-Principal about very complex student issues.

If unsure who to contact, parents/guardians should contact the school on 03 9379 3979.

c. Addressing concerns or complaints:

What you can expect the school will do in response to a concern or complaint:

Level 1
The teacher or relevant staff member will:

- Make every effort to resolve concerns and complaints before involving the next level.
- Acknowledge all complaints made and try to resolve the concern or complaint by talking to the parent/guardian and collecting information.
- Provide feedback for the parent/guardian.

Level 2
The Department Leaders will:

- Make every effort to resolve concerns and complaints before involving the next level.
- Acknowledge all complaints made and try to resolve the concern or the school complaint.
- Provide feedback for the parent/guardian.

Level 3
The Principal/Assistant Principal:

- Will make every effort to resolve concerns and complaints before involving other levels of the department.
- Will acknowledge all complaints made and try to resolve the concern or the school complaint.
- May choose to respond to the complaint through an informal process. This applies particularly to cases where the complaint is minor, the complainant wishes the matter to be dealt with informally or the complaint has arisen from a
lack of or unclear communication.

- Will monitor the situation.
- Will dismiss or accept the complaint. Acceptance may involve a range of appropriate remedies offered at the schools discretion, as listed further in this document.
- May investigate the complaint through formal interviews, written statements, conveying the details of the complaint to the respondent in writing and providing the opportunity for a written response when the complaint is of a serious nature.
- May need to take advice from the Department's Regional Office should the complaint involve complex issues.
- Will determine whether a concern or complaint should be managed through the school's concerns and complaints procedures or through other complaint processes of the Department.

Full details regarding formal complaint resolution procedures are contained within the Department of Education’s 'Local Complaints Resolution Procedures' handbook, and contain the following steps.

2. 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 appropriate Regional Office on 03 9291 6500. The regional community liaison 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 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. They 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.

3. Parent Advocates/Support:

In special circumstances, complainants and/or respondents can seek the services of an advocate when they feel they are unable to express their concern clearly. An advocate can be a friend, a member of School Council or someone who is available through an appropriate support organisation and who does not receive a fee for service. In more serious issues, all parties involved may seek the services of a mediator, if there is a 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.

4. Managing and recording parent concerns and complaints:

It is important that all complaints adhere to the following procedures and that outcomes are fully documented when of a more serious nature. Documentation will include:

- Name and contact details (with permission) of the person with a concern or complaint
- The date the concern was expressed or complaint made
- A brief description of the concern or complaint
- Details of the school person 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/practices.

A parents' complaint register will be held in the Principal's Office for parent concerns or complaints of a more serious nature.

5. Resolution.

If a concern or complaint is substantiated in whole or part, the school will apply an appropriate remedy. At its discretion and depending on the circumstances, the school may respond by providing:

- An explanation or further information about the issue
- Information for accessing outside support
- An apology, expression of regret or admission of fault
- The cancellation of a debt or refund (such as for school payments)

EVALUATION

This policy will be reviewed as part of the school’s three-year review cycle. As part of the review process, the school will:

- 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.
Appendix 1

COMMON QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS WHEN MAKING A COMPLAINT

When making a complaint:
- Your child’s school should always be your first point of contact
- Concerns are best resolved at the school
- The Department expects that most complaints will be resolved by the school

How do I raise an issue or make a complaint?
1. Clarify the issue (what is your concern?)
   Before you approach the school or your child’s teacher:
   - Be clear about the topic or issue you want to discuss
   - Focus on the things that are genuinely affecting your child
   - Always remain calm and remember you may not have all the facts relating to
     the circumstances of the topic or issue you wish to discuss
   - Think about what would be an acceptable outcome for you and your child
   - Be informed; check the Department’s policies or guidelines, where relevant
     o DEECD website http://www.education.vic.gov.au
   - Ask the school for a copy of the Concerns and Complaints Policy.

2. Contact the school
   There are a number of ways you can raise any concerns you have about your child and
   their education. You can:
   - Make an appointment to speak on the phone or in person with your child’s class
     teacher, the year level coordinator or home ·group teacher; ensuring that you
     inform the school about the issue you wish to discuss
   - Write a note to your child's teacher outlining your concerns
   - Consider speaking with the school's student welfare coordinator, if you feel that
     this would be appropriate
   - Arrange any meeting times or phone calls through the school office (this is more
     convenient for both you and your child’s teacher and does not interrupt teachers
     during the time they need to be with their students).
   The class teacher or year level coordinator, together with any others who may be
   involved, should be given a reasonable amount of time to take the steps required to
   resolve or address your concerns. Remember, it may not always be possible to
   resolve an issue to your complete satisfaction.

3. Contact the Principal or Assistant Principal
   Most concerns are resolved by following the first two steps above. However, if the
   issue remains unresolved after you have approached your child's teacher or other
   school staff, you can then ask to see the Principal or Assistant Principal. To do this, you
   will need to request an appointment through the school office. Please note:
   - The Principal may ask another senior staff member to speak with you on their
     behalf.
   - If a teacher is going to be present at the meeting, the meeting is more likely to
     occur outside of classroom hours.
   If your concern is related to issues of school policy, it should be raised more formally
   (in writing) with the Principal or the School Council.
Appendix 2

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Rights for Parents/Guardians
   - For their children to be safe from harm at all times
   - For all parents and children to be treated equally
   - To be involved in their child's school.
   - That parents/guardians have a right to provide input into child's school and procedures through their School Council.
   - To be kept informed by their class teacher/school
   - That all concerns and complaints will be investigated and will be treated seriously
   - That the school will respond to all concerns and complaints
   - That all serious concerns will be forwarded to the principal
   - For any concern to be treated confidentially and records treated with privacy
   - That teachers will communicate with parents/guardians directly.
   - To be listened to and spoken to privately and politely
   - When possible, that an appropriate time and place will be selected to express any concerns
   - That teachers will support parents’ understandings of any concerns, by providing all the information needed.

2. Rights for Staff:
   - That all staff will be treated with respect and spoken to politely and/or listened to.
   - Parents/guardians will make an appropriate time and place to express any concerns
   - That all parents/guardians will initially speak to the appropriate teacher
   - Parents and guardians will contact the teacher in person or via email.
   - That parents/guardians will maintain confidentiality whilst their concerns are being investigated
   - That parents/guardians will respect the school code of conduct or discipline policy.

3. School Responsibilities:
   - Ensure all reasonable steps have been undertaken to resolve parent/guardian concerns and complaints
   - Contact the Regional Office for support with any complex complaints
   - Ensure all new staff members are aware of the school and Department's policies and procedures in relation to addressing parent concerns and complaints
   - Annually brief all staff members (including volunteers) on the policy and procedures
   - Provide staff with (or provide access to) training and support appropriate to their responsibilities under the procedures
   - Establish and maintain administrative processes to manage concerns and complaints raised at the school.
Appendix 3

CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS FLOW CHART OR POINT OF CONTACT

**Level 1**
*Teacher:* Usually best placed to resolve concerns and complaints relating to student learning and specific student incidents in the teacher's class or group

**Level 2**
*Department Leaders* can provide support when students from other classes are involved.

P-2 Depart. Leader
3-6 Depart. Leader

**Level 3**
*Assistant Principal:* Usually best placed to resolve concerns and complaints relating to staff members or complex student welfare/discipline issues.  
*Kate Story (Acting: Margo Edgar)*

*Principal:* Usually best placed to resolve concerns and complaints relating to school policy, school management, staff members or complex student issues. *Scott Mullen*
Appendix 4

FLOW CHART FOR MORE SERIOUS CONCERNS

FIGURE 1

CONTACT TEAM LEADER OR PRINCIPAL CLASS OFFICER

LISTEN

CLARIFY

INVESTIGATE e.g. children, staff

FEEDBACK TO PARENT DISMISS OR ACCEPT

DOCUMENT all aspects of the process

SEEK RESOLUTION e.g. possible change in action

SEEK DEPARTMENT ADVICE

MONITOR