

# Complaints Management at Eaglehawk Secondary College

## 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 and realistic expectations about what can be achieved by the school.

Our College treats parent concerns seriously and always reflects on the issues raised through complaints to consider and evaluate its practice and improve the learning opportunities for its students.

If you are involved in a complaint you should be assured that the complaint will be explored and, where possible, a full explanation will be provided once the facts are known. The College, where appropriate, will 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. These CORE values apply to all members of the College Community and are available on the College's website and in other promotional material. In such an environment, open, two-way communication, free of blame, will assist our school to handle concerns or complaints being raised by a parent, student or member of the community.

When a school receives a complaint from a parent (either written or verbal), our school will follow the processes outlined below.

## School responsibilities

It is the responsibility of the school to respond to and address written (letter and email) and verbal (face-to-face and phone) complaints raised by parents from their school community.

- Complaints should be directed to the General Office whom will then direct them to the Principal or Assistant Principal.
- The complaint will be investigated and considered with parents contacted within 24 hrs of receiving the complaint to acknowledge the process the school will follow and who will be involved.
- A response regarding the outcome of the complaint will be provided within 5 days unless there are extenuating or complex circumstances.
- The school's response may include (but is not limited to), change in school policy, further investigation of a staff member and appropriate action or referral, referral to the regional office of DET, consideration by College Council or no further action required.
- If parents are not satisfied with the result of the complaint or the way that it has been dealt with then they can seek further advice from the DET Regional Office, Community Liaison Officers.

The College will consider all complaints by:

- Raising the issues in the complaint with relevant staff and/or members of the school community
- Consulting, where appropriate, with relevant sections of the Department and/or external agencies for technical or other advice
- Discussing the school's findings with the parent in an attempt to reach an agreed resolution
- Considering the engagement of a mediator where a complaint has the potential to become intractable

**The College will also:**

- Publicise the school's complaint-handling procedures within the school community and make them readily available
- Review the school's complaint-handling procedures regularly
- Ensure that complaints received are recorded and actions taken to resolve the complaint are well documented
- Ensure a school record of all complaints, both written and verbal, is maintained at the school
- Seek advice from either the central office or region about the management of complaints, including complex or challenging complaints or complainants and the use of mediation/conciliation services, and seek specialist or technical advice from external agencies and/or the Department when required.
- Ensure all school personnel are aware of the school's parent complaint-handling procedures and provide opportunities for staff to attend training/professional development activities with a focus on complaint management.
- Actively assist parents with the complaint process, informing them that at any point of the complaint process they are able to be supported by an advocate/support person. The role of the advocate/support person in this process is a supportive and enabling one. A complainant's advocate/support person may be a member of the family, a friend, a community member or a person provided through an appropriate support/advocate agency. The advocate/support person in the parent complaint process does not receive a fee for service. The complainant should inform the Principal if they want to include an advocate/support person in the complaint process and provide the name of the advocate, contact details and the relationship to the complainant. An advocate/support person's role may include:
  - assistance for the complainant to clarify the issues in the complaint
  - discussion of difficulties being experienced by the complainant
  - assistance in the development of a co-operative and collaborative working relationship between the complainant and the school community
  - assistance for the complainant to understand Department policy and guidelines and the resolution being proposed for the complaint.

## **Resolving complaints**

A Principal may contact the Regional Director and request the region's intervention to help resolve a complaint. The Principal will have exhausted the school's parent complaint-handling procedures and be of the belief that the complaint would not be able to be resolved at the school level. The parent will be advised that their complaint will be handled by personnel from the region.

Where a complaint is found to be justified, schools are able to resolve complaints by:

- an apology or expression of regret
- a change of decision
- a change of policy, procedure or practice
- a refund of parent payments
- offering the opportunity for student counselling or other support.

## **Role of the DET Regional Office**

If a parent is not satisfied that their complaint has been resolved by the school, or if their complaint is about the Principal of the school, they may refer their complaint to the relevant region. In addition, the region can provide advice:

- to schools, and support, when they are responding to parent complaints
- to parents when they are seeking to make a complaint at their school.