

POLICY TITLE: ENPS Queries, Concerns and Complaints Policy
 DATE RATIFIED: February 2019
 REVIEW DATE: 2023

ENPS GUIDING STATEMENTS

ENPS VISION: Global learners and leaders, exceeding expectations.			
ENPS MISSION: We maximise the potential of all; empowering independence, excellence, innovation and engagement with the world.			
Critical Engagement with the World	Academic Excellence	Inclusive Learning Environment	Personal and Social Wellbeing

RATIONALE

Queries, concerns and complaints are best and most effectively managed at the school level. Essendon North Primary School recognises that it is in the best interest of students for there to be a trusting and cooperative relationship between parent and school. ENPS considers that queries, concerns and complaints provide a valuable opportunity for reflection and learning.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to provide a framework for the school community to effectively raise issues with the school and to provide clear and explicit guidelines for responding to queries, concerns and complaints in an effective and timely manner, in order to:

- provide a harmonious, positive and productive school environment
- provide a supportive school culture
- build positive relationships between students, parents and staff
- facilitate continuous improvement
- provide a safe working environment for staff
- promote home-school partnerships.

IMPLEMENTATION

ENPS acknowledges its responsibility to manage and resolve queries, concerns, complaints fairly and efficiently, and in accordance with *ENPS Statement of Values*, *ENPS Community Code of Conduct* and relevant state-wide legislation.

When addressing a concern or complaint it is expected that all parties will:

- show respect and understanding of each other's point of view

- operate within applicable legislation
- acknowledge that their goal is to achieve an outcome acceptable to all parties
- act in good faith and in a calm and courteous manner
- recognise that all parties have rights and responsibilities which must be balanced.

All Department staff (schools, region, central office) must observe the code of conduct for Victorian public sector employees.

These procedures cover queries, 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, except as detailed below.

These procedures do not apply to matters where rights and processes for review and appeal already exist, as detailed in the *School Policy and Advisory Guide*. These include:

- student discipline matters involving expulsions
- complaints about staff that if upheld would constitute misconduct
- student critical incident matters
- other criminal matters.

Communication

ENPS will make information for addressing queries, concerns and complaints readily available to parents and the school community in clear and easy-to-understand language.

Information on the school's procedures for addressing queries, concerns and complaints will be:

- Published on the school's website
- Provided in the parent handbook
- Provided in the ENPS staff handbook
- A summary will be printed in the school newsletter, as appropriate

Processes

a. Expectations of persons raising the query, concern or complaint

As soon as possible after an issue occurs, a person raising a query, 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 the query, concerns or complaints:

The complainant should make contact (visit, telephone, in writing or email), in line with the following stages when raising queries, concerns or complaints.

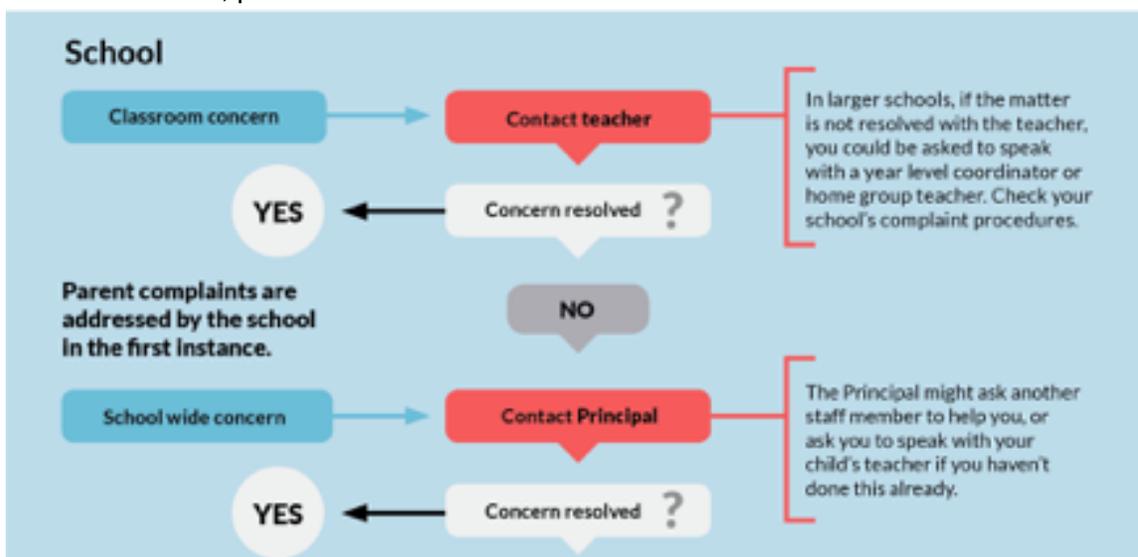
Stage 1: Contact with teachers

- Queries, concerns or complaints about general classroom matters, learning issues and incidents, should be referred to the relevant classroom teacher or relevant staff member.
- Contact the Assistant Principal/s, if students from several classes are involved, if the matter is a complex student issue, or if the concern or complaint is of a more serious or confidential nature.

Stage 2: Contact with the Principal

- Queries, concerns and complaints about general school matters, including policies, school management, facilities, staffing.
- Unresolved matters previously dealt with at a classroom level should be referred to the Principal.
- Contact the Principal or the Assistant Principal/s about very complex student issues.

If unsure who to contact, persons should contact the school on 03 9379 3979.



Stage 3: Formal Communication with School Council

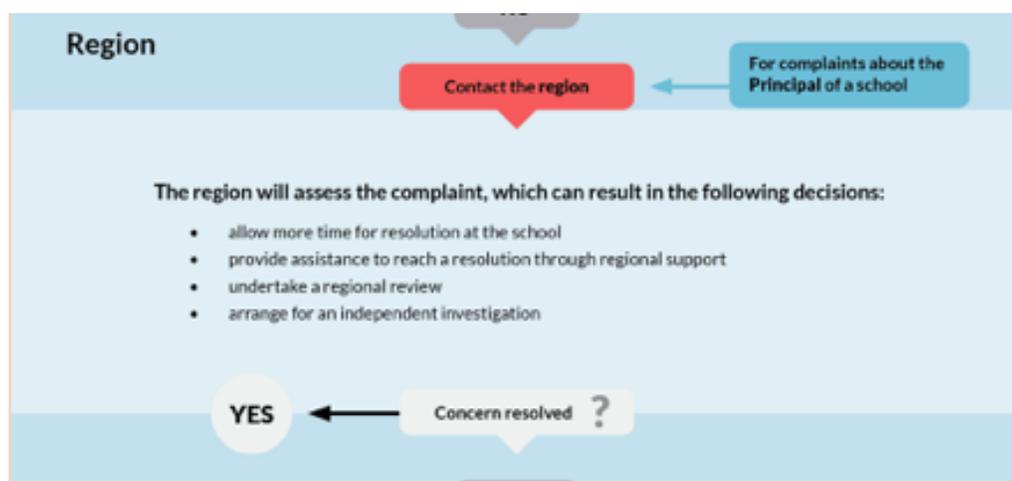
If the query, concern or complaint concerns a school policy, the matter can be raised by contacting the School Council President or a school councillor. After initial discussion the matter can be formalised by writing to the school council.

ENPS POLICIES/POLICIES REGISTER/QUERIES, CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS POLICY

- If the School Council regards the issue as operational, it will be referred to the Principal.
- If the matter is regarded as a policy or governance manner, the Principal or School Council president may agenda the item for a school council meeting.

Stage 4: Regional Advice

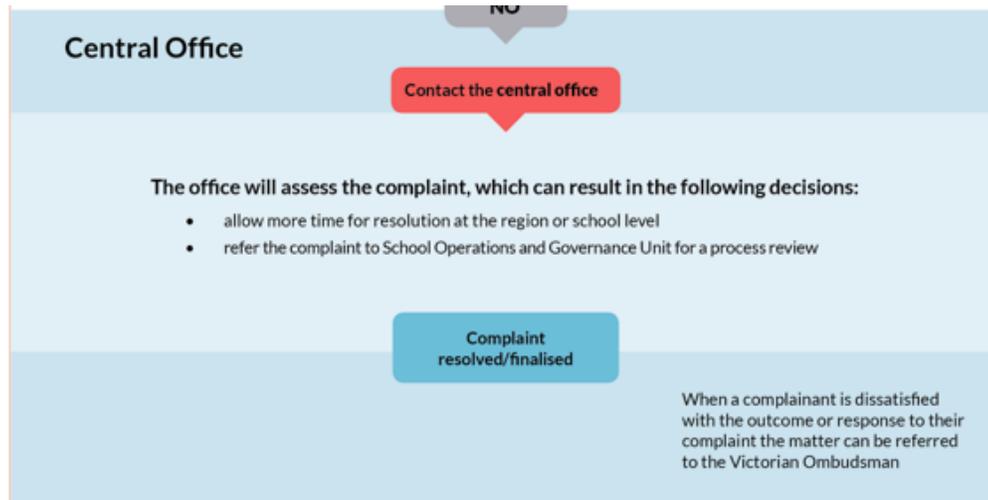
If any party to the complaint believes a resolution cannot be reached, then advice should be sought from the Community Liaison Officer at the DET South Western Region on 1300 333 232. Any parties involved in the complaint may seek this advice.



Stage 5: Central Advice

When a complaint remains unresolved after referral to the region, parents are able to request a review of process through the Deputy Secretary, Regional Services Group.

It may not always be possible to resolve all complaints to the parent's satisfaction. This could happen when the nature of the issues raised in the complaint is governed by the Department's policies or guidelines or if the parent has unrealistic expectations about the outcome of their complaint.



c. Addressing queries, concerns or complaints

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

Stage 1

The teacher, relevant staff member and/or Assistant Principal will:

- respond in a timely manner (within two or three working days)
- acknowledge and try to resolve the query, concern or complaint by talking to the parent/carer and collecting information
- make every effort to resolve concerns and complaints before involving the next stage.
- document concerns and steps taken towards resolution
- provide feedback for the parent/carer.

Stage 2

The Principal/Assistant Principals:

- will respond in a timely manner (within two or three working days)
- will acknowledge and try to resolve the query, concern or complaint
- will make every effort to resolve concerns and complaints before involving other levels of the department
- 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 document concerns and steps taken towards resolution
- will monitor the situation
- will dismiss or accept the complaint. Acceptance may involve a range of appropriate remedies offered at the school's 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 seek 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 queries, 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 '*Parent complaints - Government Schools*' website and brochure.

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 1300 333 232. 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 DET School Operations and Governance Unit, Regional Services Group. They 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 Regional Services Group should act on the information provided.

Parents are able to take their complaint to the Victorian Ombudsman if they are dissatisfied with the outcome or response from the Department, or if they feel their complaint is not being handled properly or in a timely manner.

Parent Advocates/Support

At any point of the complaint process, complainants and/or respondents 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. The advocate/support person may be a member of the family, a friend, a community member, a member of School Council 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 cooperative 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.

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.

Managing and Recording Parent Concerns and Complaints

It is important that all complaints adhere to these 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 complaint register will be held in the Principal's Office for concerns or complaints of a more serious nature.

Resolution

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

- an explanation or further information about the issue
- 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.

If a person with a concern or complaint is not satisfied with the outcome determined by the school, they should contact the South Western Regional Office of the Department of Education on 1300 333 232.

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.

DOCUMENT HISTORY

Version	Effective Date	Owner	Description of change
2	December 2016	Continuous Improvement Sub-Committee	Substantial updates to previous policy in line with DET Parent Complaints Policy, and ensuring consistency with current school practices and processes
2.1	February 2019	Scott Mullen	Reviewed in accordance with DET guidelines

** Information on revisions and new versions to be added to the top of the table, therefore the most recent is always on top.*

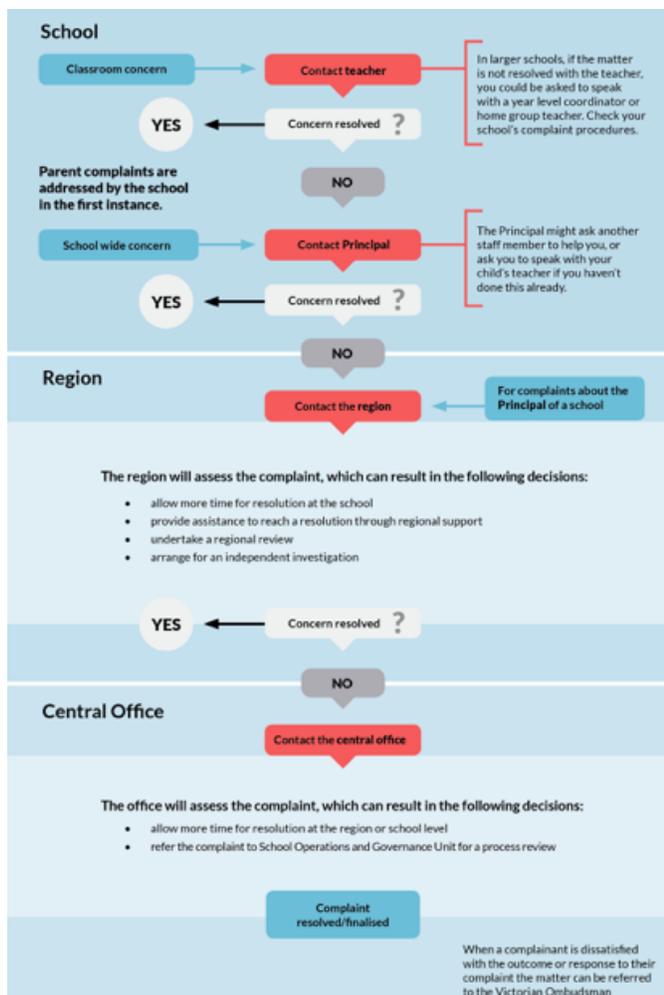
APPENDIX 1

Relevant Legislation:

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

- *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*
- *Education and Training Reform Regulations 2007*
- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*
- *Protected Disclosure Act 2012*
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*
- *Wrongs Act 1958*
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Commonwealth)*
- *Disability Standards for Education 2005 (Commonwealth)*

DET Parent Complaint Flowchart



APPENDIX 2

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
- Ask the school for a copy of the *Queries, Concerns and Complaints Policy*.
- Be informed; check the Department's policies or guidelines, where relevant
 - o DET website <http://www.education.vic.gov.au>
- 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

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 3

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Rights for Parents and Carers

- 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.

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.

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 4

The complaint-handling process must reflect the following guiding principles, which are informed by the Australian/New Zealand Standard – Guidelines for complaint management in organizations (AS/NZS 10002:2014).

Visibility	<p>Information about how and where to make a complaint, as well as how a complaint will be handled, should be regularly publicised within the school community.</p> <p>The actions taken to respond to a complaint should be well documented and include the reasons underpinning any decisions made.</p>
Accessibility	<p>Information about how to make a complaint and the school's procedures when responding to a complaint should be easily accessible. The complaint-handling process should be flexible and include the ability to make a complaint in person, by phone and in writing. Support should also be given to parents with special needs, including translations, interpreters and enabling a parent to seek the services of an advocate.</p>
Responsiveness	<p>Receipt of written complaints should be acknowledged by communicating with parents as soon as possible. Complaints should be addressed promptly and the parents kept informed of the progress of their complaint when the matter is complex and will take time to bring to resolution.</p>
Objectivity	<p>Each complaint must be treated in an equitable, objective and unbiased manner.</p>
Cost	<p>There should be no cost to the parent for access to the complaint-handling process at the school, region or central office.</p>
Protection of Privacy	<p>Personally identifiable information concerning the parent should be actively protected from disclosure except where needed in relation to the complaint. This means that the complaint should only be discussed with those directly involved in the complaint-handling process.</p>
Student-focused	<p>The school should be open to feedback including complaints and should show a commitment to resolving complaints with the educational wellbeing of students as the first priority.</p>
Accountability	<p>Schools are required to have a fair, effective and efficient complaint-handling process. Schools are accountable, both internally and externally, for their decision making and complaint-handling performance. Schools need to be able to provide explanations and reasons for their decisions.</p>

Continual Improvement	Parent complaint-handling procedures should be regularly reviewed for improvement. Complaint data and feedback should be used to identify recurrent themes and to implement improvement measures where a need is identified.
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