

Introduction

Scoresby Secondary College recognises that the involvement of parents in their child's education and the development of strong family - school partnerships are important for children's development and learning. Scoresby Secondary College also recognises that in all partnerships there may be times of disagreement and issues of concern that will need to be resolved. This policy provides the Scoresby Secondary College community with a procedure for investigating parent concerns and complaints.

Scoresby Secondary College's approach to handling concerns and complaints is based on our College's values and our commitment to:

- Providing a safe and supportive learning environment
- Building a positive relationship between students, parents and staff
- Providing a safe work environment for staff

Complaints and concerns made by parents will in no way adversely affect their children.

Scope of Policy

These procedures cover concerns and complaints about:

- General issues of student behaviour that are contrary to the College'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
- General administrative issues
- Any other school -related matters except as detailed below

These procedures do not cover matters for which there are existing rights of review or appeal, as detailed in the Department of Education and Training (the Department) Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide. Such matters include:

- Student discipline matters involving expulsion
- Complaints about employee conduct or performance 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

If it becomes apparent that a concern or complaint relates to such matters, the relevant procedures should be implemented immediately. The Principal or the Department will provide further guidance in this instance.

This policy is not applicable where a complainant has employed another party to represent them, such as a solicitor. In these circumstances the matter needs to be referred to the Department's Legal Services Branch for their assessment.

How to Raise a Complaint or Concern

Parents wishing to raise a concern or complaint should contact SSC in the first instance and telephone, visit or write to:

- The year level coordinator, if students from several classes are involved
- The Assistant Principal, if the issue relates to staff members or complex student issues
- The Principal, if the issue relates to school policy, College management, staff members or very complex student issues

In the circumstance the complaint or concern is about the Principal, in the first instance the Parent is encouraged to raise the matter with the Principal. If the Parent feels unable to do this, or is unsatisfied with the Principal response, then the Parent should raise the matter with the regional office. (Information about the Department's Concerns and Complaints Policy, as noted below in section "Further Information", may be of help to the parent in these circumstances).

If the complainant is not sure whom to contact they should contact the Assistant Principal.

The office is able to provide contact details for any staff member.

The College contact details are:

- Phone: 9765 4100
- Email: Scoresby.sc@edumail.vic.gov.au

Parents may seek the services of an advocate if they feel they are unable to express their concerns clearly. An advocate can be a friend or colleague or someone who is available through an appropriate support organisation that **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 in coming to an agreement.

Expectations

Scoresby Secondary College expects a parent 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
- Exercise patience and respect for the subsequent process of assessment and reconciliation undertaken

Scoresby Secondary College 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

Addressing Concerns and Complaints

Scoresby Secondary College will record the following details of all complaints received, even if the complaint is minor:

- Name and contact details (with permission) of the person with a concern or complaint
- The date the concern or complaint was made
- The form in which the concern or complaint was received (such as face – to -face, by telephone, in writing, via email)
- A brief description of the concern or complaint
- Details of 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 school's policy or procedures

Scoresby Secondary College will:

- Make every effort to resolve concerns and complaints before involving other levels of the Department
- Provide complainants a copy of this policy
- 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
- Act on all complaints promptly, by the staff member who receives the complaint and by any staff to whom the complaint is referred on to
- Make every effort to resolve a concern or complaint as quickly as possible

In all cases, Scoresby Secondary College will try to resolve a concern or complaint within 10 days. However, if the complaint is complex or if the complaint requires advice from the Department's Regional Office, SSC may require more time to investigate and resolve it. In these circumstances the school will inform the complainant of the timeframe estimated for the investigation.

Outcomes and Remedies

Complaint Substantiated

If a concern or complaint is substantiated in whole or part, Scoresby Secondary College will offer an appropriate remedy.

For example, at its discretion and depending on the circumstances, Scoresby Secondary College may 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 practice
- A fee refund

The remedy will be implemented as soon as practicable.

Complaint Dismissed

A complaint can only be dismissed:

- After it has been investigated
- If an investigation has determined that the complaint cannot be substantiated or
- If on investigation and explanation, the complainant withdraws the complaint

An explanation will be given to the complainant of why the complaint has been dismissed.

Complaint Unresolved

A complaint is considered to be unresolved if the complainant does not agree on a course of action and/or remedy, or if remedy cannot be implemented. In such cases, Scoresby Secondary College must involve the Department's Regional Office to assist in resolving the complaint.

It may not be possible to fully resolve all complaints to the complainant's satisfaction. This may happen if the complainant has unreasonable expectations or if the Department's policies or regulations are contrary to their views.

Other Considerations

Other Relevant Scoresby Secondary College Policies

In addition to this policy, Scoresby Secondary College has separate procedures and policies for specific areas, including:

- Procedure for placement of students in classes for coming years
- Policy for sports team selection
- Policy for performing art performance selection

Anonymous Complaints

Scoresby Secondary College is required to investigate all complaints. However, staff may not be able to fully investigate a complaint if they cannot effectively liaise with the complainant. Furthermore, anonymous complaints raise issues of natural justice for respondents who have a right to know particulars of the allegations made against them. The Principal should determine the extent to which an anonymous complaint received by the school shall be investigated. If the anonymous complaint involves the Principal the Department's Regional Director should make the decision whether it is to be investigated.

Unreasonable Complainant Conduct

The Principal can determine if a complainant's conduct is unreasonable.

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 orientated towards conflict.

(Refer to Unreasonable complaint conduct: interim practice manual at www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au)

If the Principal determines a complainant conduct is unreasonable they will:

- Develop a plan to address the complaint and complainant's interaction with staff
- Inform the complainant of the plan
- Ensure all staff adhere to the plan as closely as possible

Advice may need to be sought from the DET regional director. If the complainant uses threatening and violent behaviour all DET employees should follow the Occupational Violence Policy.

Referral of Concerns and Complaints

If a parent with a concern or complaint is not satisfied following the investigation and complaints process with the outcome determined by the school, they should contact the Department's Regional Office.

Further Information

Further information about the Department's complaints policy and procedures can be found at www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/pages/complaints.aspx.

At this site there are links to *Parents Complaints -further resources and information*.

Communication

Scoresby Secondary College will make information about the procedures for addressing concerns and complaints readily available to parents and the school community. This policy will be published on the school website and will be available at the school office.

An Information Sheet (www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/parentcomplaint.htm) is available to download in a range of community languages on the DET website.

Training

Scoresby Secondary College 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

Scoresby Secondary College is aware that the Department's Regional Director has a responsibility to ensure that training in complaints management is offered to school staff (including school councillors) and non-departmental employees.

Monitoring

When the complaint is made verbally, is simple and easily resolved in a telephone call, a brief note in the College officer's diary recording details of the issue and the resolution of the issue may be all that is required.

The Principal will ensure a record is maintained of all written complaints/school's response/outcome in a secure location within the school. The Principal may report to College council on concerns and complaints where practices and policies may require review in light of complaints. (No identifying details of complainants/complaints are to be provided to council).

The Principal and College Council, as appropriate to their roles, will monitor parent concerns and complaints and consider issues raised through the complaints process, and any other relevant

information from the parent opinion survey, when undertaking a review of school's policies, procedures and operations.

The Principal and College Council, as appropriate to their roles, will review its information about complaints made over time to identify common or recurring issues that may need addressing and assess the effectiveness of these and other procedures and whether they are being followed.

The College Council will review its policy and procedures to effectively address parent concerns and complaints as part of its cyclic policy and procedures review schedule.

Reference

This policy has been developed using the DET guide Addressing parents' concerns and complaints effectively: policy and guides and in collaboration with the Scoresby Secondary College community.

Explanatory Notes

- "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.
- 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.
- A "complaint" is an expression of grievance or resentment where the complainant is seeking redress or justice.

Evaluation

This policy will be reviewed by College Council as part of the three-year review cycle or at the discretion of College Council

This policy was ratified by College Council for implementation in May 2020 and will be reviewed in May 2022