

# **Caulfield South Primary School**

## **Parent Concerns and Complaints Resolution Policy**

### **Definitions:**

For the purpose of this policy the following terms are defined as follows:

- a **'parent'** includes:
  - a person who has parental responsibility for 'major long term issues' as defined in the *Family Law Act 1975* (Commonwealth) for a student at Caulfield South Primary School (referred to as CSPS in this policy)
  - a person appointed as 'guardian' pursuant to the *Children Youth and Families Act 2005* (Victoria) for a student at CSPS
  - an informal carer with whom a student at CSPS normally or regularly resides, and who has day-to-day care and control of the child
- The **'Department'** refers to the Department of Education and Training
- a **'concern'** is a matter of interest or importance which has an undesirable impact on a student at CSPS and may be raised informally in order to improve or change a situation
- a **'complaint'** is an expression of dissatisfaction with an action taken, decision made or service provided, or the failure to provide a service, take action or make a decision at a school
- a complaint is considered to be **'resolved'** when the complainant and the school, agree on an appropriate response or resolution
- a complaint is considered to be **'finalised'** when the Principal or Department has made a final determination on the matter after exhausting the processes set out in this policy
- a complaint is considered to be **'unresolved'** when agreement cannot be reached on a course of action and/or a resolution, or if the resolution cannot be implemented

### **Rationale:**

- CSPS appreciates that it is in the best interest of students for there to be a trusting and cooperative relationship between parents and the school and the opportunity for parents to raise concerns and complaints is important in building such a relationship
- CSPS considers that raising concerns or complaints provides valuable information and feedback to the school and is an opportunity for reflection and learning
- CSPS recognises a parent's right to raise a concern or make a complaint and the school's responsibility to provide a framework within which efforts can be made to resolve these in a fair, effective and efficient manner
- In its endeavour to promote a healthy, safe and respectful school community, CSPS acknowledges the best practice of community members working in positive partnerships with school personnel where concerns and complaints are addressed early, demonstrating the responsibilities outlined in the CSPS Statement of Values, based on the Department of Education and Training (DET) template. (Appendix 1). In the handling of concerns and complaints, as with all other school business, the school will uphold the values outlined in this document.

This policy is based on the Department of Education and Training Parent complaints policy (interim) Resolving parent issues and concerns September 2016

This policy does not apply to matters where rights and processes for review and appeal already exist. These include:

- student expulsions, see: Expulsions
- complaints about staff that if upheld would constitute misconduct, see: Complaints, unsatisfactory performance and misconduct
- student critical incident matters: The school will follow the advice of the Student Critical Incident Advisory Unit
- other criminal matters, see: Police – Department Protocols

This policy covers all students at CSPS.

### **Purpose:**

- To ensure that all parents are informed of the process for raising a concern or making a complaint at CSPS, with a view to reaching a resolution
- To provide clear procedures for raising concerns or complaints. This may include (but is not limited to) issues about:
  - The management of an incident or incidents between students at the school
  - The educational or other progress of a child
  - Communication with parents
  - General administrative issues

### **Aims:**

- To assist CSPS parents to be informed about a clear process to follow if the need arises to raise a concern or complaint at the school
- To ensure that parents feel confident that CSPS will respond to parent complaints in a fair, effective and efficient manner with regards to confidentiality
- To assist CSPS staff to confidently address the concerns and complaints of parents

### **Implementation:**

When addressing a complaint, it is expected that parents and school personnel will:

- show respect and understanding of each other's point of view
  - be considerate of each other's views and respect each other's role
- operate within applicable legislation
- acknowledge that their goal is to achieve an outcome acceptable to all parties
  - be focused on resolution of the complaint, with the interests of the student involved at the centre
- act in good faith and in a calm and courteous manner
- recognise that all parties have rights and responsibilities which must be balanced.
  - respect the privacy and confidentiality of those involved, as appropriate

- recognise that schools and the Department may be subject to legal constraints on their ability to act or disclose information in some circumstances.

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

Staff will be briefed annually about the school's procedures to address concerns and complaints and they will be provided with or given access to training and support appropriate to their responsibilities under these procedures.

For further information, please see:

Creating Respectful and Safe School Communities at:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/studentmanagement/Pages/conduct.aspx>

Code of Conduct for Victorian Public Sector Employees

## Complaints process

CSPS is always happy to discuss with parents/carers and community members any concerns that they may have.

However before you approach your child's teacher or the school:

- Consult the Communication Checklist (Appendix 2) to ensure you speak to the appropriate staff member in the first instance
- clarify the issue: be clear about the issues you want to discuss
- focus on the facts and the things that genuinely affect your child
- remember you may not have all the facts relating to the matter you want to raise so be open to listening to the full picture
- think about how the matter could be resolved; what might be an acceptable outcome for you and your child
- be informed by checking the Department's and the school's policies and guidelines; see the school and DET websites
- be realistic about what the school can do

Where concerns cannot be resolved in this way, parents or community members may wish to make a formal complaint to the Assistant Principal or Principal, noting that formal complaints should be directed to a member of the school's leadership team.

If you would like to make a formal complaint, in most cases, depending on the nature of the complaint raised, our school will first seek to understand the issues and will then convene a resolution meeting with the aim of resolving the complaint together. The following process will apply:

1. **Complaint received:** Please either email, telephone or arrange a meeting through the front office with the Assistant Principal/ Principal, to outline your complaint so that we can fully understand what the issues are. We can discuss your complaint in a way that is convenient for you, whether in writing, in person or over the phone.
2. **Information gathering:** Depending on the issues raised in the complaint, the Principal, Assistant Principal or appropriate staff member may need to gather further information to properly understand the situation. This process may also involve speaking to others to obtain details about the situation or the concerns raised.

- 3. Response:** Where possible, a resolution meeting will be arranged with the Assistant Principal/Principal to discuss the complaint with the objective of reaching a resolution satisfactory to all parties. If after the resolution meeting we are unable to resolve the complaint together, we will work with you to produce a written summary of the complaint in the event you would like to take further action. In some circumstances, the Principal may determine that a resolution meeting would not be appropriate. In this situation, a response to the complaint will be provided in writing.

[Note – we recommend including the above procedures for a resolution meeting to take place as part of your complaints process. A face-to-face resolution meeting provides the best opportunity to repair relationships between complainants and the school. Preparing a written summary of a complaint together with the complainant can be a useful strategy for ensuring that all parties understand the issues in dispute, and reach an agreement about the most important issues that need to be addressed further. However, this process is not compulsory and may be amended to reflect how you would like to manage complaints at your school. You may prefer, for example, to respond to complaints in writing].

- 4. Timelines:** CSPS will acknowledge receipt of your complaint as soon as possible (usually within two school days) and will seek to resolve complaints in a timely manner. Depending on the complexity of the complaint, CSPS may need some time to gather enough information to fully understand the circumstances of your complaint. We will endeavour to complete any necessary information gathering and hold a resolution meeting where appropriate within 10 working days of the complaint being raised. In situations where further time is required, CSPS will consult with you and discuss any interim solutions to the dispute that can be put in place.

The school will consider all parent complaints by:

- the relevant staff member acknowledging a concern or complaint promptly via direct contact, email or mail and providing the complainant with a timeframe for investigating the complaint
- following up issues in the complaint with relevant staff and/or members of the school community
- consulting, where appropriate, with relevant school services officers, sections of the Department and/or external agencies for technical or other advice
- attempting to resolve a complaint as quickly as possible. If the complaint is complex, involves many students or a range of issues, additional time may be required to investigate and resolve the problem. The complainant will be made aware of any adjustments required regarding process or timeframes
- discussing the school's findings with the parent in an attempt to reach an agreed resolution

CSPS will 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

## Resolution

Where a complaint is found to be justified, the school may be able to resolve the issue by:

- an explanation, apology or expression of regret
- an acknowledgement of differing perspectives and agreement about how this may be managed
- an agreement about changes in behaviour required
- an undertaking regarding future acceptable behaviour
- an acknowledgement of error
- 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
- other actions consistent with school values that are intended to support the student, parent and school relationship, engagement, and participation in the school community.

Solutions will be implemented as soon as practicable.

The school will ensure all serious complaints, both written and verbal and the actions taken to resolve these complaints are well documented and records maintained at the school. This will include:

- name and contact details of the person making the complaint
- student/s involved, if relevant
- details of the staff responding to/following up the complaint
- date the complaint was made
- a description of the complaint
- any action taken to investigate and resolve the complaint
- the outcome of any action regarding the complaint and the resolution
- recommendations for any further action

## Escalation

Where a resolution is not able to be agreed between parties at the school level, the principal may consider engaging a mediator if they believe this may lead to a satisfactory outcome. They may also decide to contact the regional director and request the region's intervention to help resolve a complaint. The principal will ensure the school's parent complaint-handling procedures have been exhausted and be of the belief that the complaint would not be able to be resolved at the school level. The parent would then be advised that their complaint will be handled by personnel from the region.

Where a complaint has been resolved to the satisfaction of the Principal, after following school policy and procedures but a parent is not satisfied with the manner in which their complaint has been treated by the school, or their complaint is about the principal of the school, the parent may wish to contact the South East Victoria regional office.

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.

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.

When complaints are sent to areas of the Department not identified above, the complaint may be referred to the relevant level as identified in the Parent Complaint Flowchart. (Appendix No3)

When a complainant demonstrates unreasonable conduct:

All complaints will be considered in accordance with the school's complaint-handling procedures, including complex or challenging complaints and when parent behaviour is thought to be unreasonable.

While the Principal will consider a range of factors and views, they may at any point in the process outlined in this policy, consider a parent's behaviour to be unreasonable. In these circumstances, the Principal will communicate the basis on which the conclusion was made, to the parent in writing. The Principal may also indicate an acceptable procedure for future communication with the parent about their complaint.

The Department considers behaviour to be unreasonable when:

- it is clearly and significantly outside the expectations of cooperation, courtesy and respect
- it calls for staff resources and time unjustified by the nature or significance of the complaint
- an action or complaint is brought without merit, often to cause annoyance to another person
- it is oriented towards conflict.

When a complaint is made anonymously:

The Department requires all complaints to be considered. However, it recognises that its staff might not be able to fully consider a complaint if they cannot effectively liaise with the parent. Furthermore, anonymous complaints raise natural justice issues for respondents who have a right to know particulars of the allegations made against them.

The Principal will determine, when necessary, in consultation with other relevant personnel from the central office or region, the extent to which an anonymous complaint received by the school shall be investigated.

At CSPS we support the development of learner agency where students are encouraged to feel confident and capable of taking action. We want students to own their actions, learn from mistakes and receive acknowledgement for being courageous and parents are encouraged to demonstrate these behaviours, attitudes, and values in support of our school culture.

The school's Complaints Resolution Policy and procedures will be made available within the school community and on the school website. The community will also be reminded of these processes through the school newsletter.

### **Relevant policies and documents:**

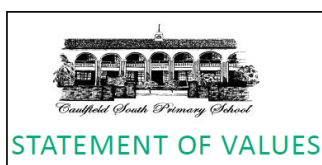
This policy should be read in conjunction with the following policies and documents:

- CSPS Statement of Values
- Student Engagement Policy
- Code of Conduct Policies
- Safe and Respectful Schools Policy
- Home/School Communication Protocols
- Parent complaints policy (interim) Resolving parent issues and concerns September 2016
- DET Parent Complaints Flowchart

### **Evaluation:**

The school will review the Complaints Resolution Policy and procedures as part of the three-year evaluation cycle.

## Appendix:1



### **PROMOTING HEALTHY, SAFE AND RESPECTFUL SCHOOL COMMUNITIES**

Caulfield South Primary School recognises the importance of the partnership between schools and parents to support student learning, engagement and wellbeing. We share a commitment to, and a responsibility for, ensuring inclusive, safe and orderly environments for children and young people.

This Statement of Values sets out our behavioural expectations of all members in this school community, including the principal, all school staff, parents, students and visitors. It respects the diversity of individuals in our school community and addresses the shared responsibilities of all members in building safe and respectful school communities.

Discrimination, sexual and other forms of harassment, bullying, violence, aggression and threatening behaviour are unacceptable and will not be tolerated in this school.

Our Statement of Values acknowledges that parents and school staff are strongly motivated to do their best for every child. Everyone has the right to differing opinions and views and to raise concerns, as long as we do this respectfully as a community working together.

### **RESPONSIBILITIES**

#### **AS PRINCIPALS AND SCHOOL LEADERS, WE WILL:**

- Work collaboratively to create a school environment where respectful and safe conduct is expected of everyone.
- Behave in a manner consistent with the standards of our profession and meet core responsibilities to provide inclusive, safe and orderly environments.
- Plan, implement and monitor arrangements to ensure the care, safety, security and general wellbeing of all students in attendance at the school is protected.
- Identify and support students who are or may be at risk.
- Do our best to ensure every child achieves their personal and learning potential.
- Work with parents to understand their child's needs and, where necessary, adapt the learning environment accordingly.
- Respond appropriately when inclusive, safe or orderly behaviour is not demonstrated and implement appropriate interventions and sanctions when required.
- Make known to parents the school's communication and complaints procedures.
- Ask any person who is acting in an offensive or disorderly way to leave the school grounds.

#### **AS TEACHERS AND ALL NON-TEACHING STAFF, WE WILL:**

- Model positive behaviour to students consistent with the standards of our profession.
- Proactively engage with parents about student outcomes.
- Work with parents to understand the needs of each student and, where necessary, adapt the learning environment accordingly.
- Work collaboratively with parents to improve learning and wellbeing outcomes for students with additional needs.
- Communicate with the principal and school leaders in the event we anticipate or face any tension or challenging behaviours from parents.
- Treat all members of the school community with respect.

#### **AS PARENTS, WE WILL:**

- Model positive behaviour to our child.
- Ensure our child attends school on time, every day the school is open for instruction.
- Take an interest in our child's school and learning.
- Work with the school to achieve the best outcomes for our child.
- Communicate constructively with the school and use expected processes and protocols when raising concerns.
- Support school staff to maintain a safe learning environment for all students.
- Follow the school's complaints processes if there are complaints.
- Treat all school leaders, staff, students, and other members of the school community with respect.



## PROMOTING HEALTHY, SAFE AND RESPECTFUL SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

### AS STUDENTS, WE WILL:

- Model positive behaviour to other students.
- Comply with and model school values.
- Behave in a safe and responsible manner.
- Respect ourselves, other members of the school community and the school environment.
- Actively participate in school.
- Not disrupt the learning of others and make the most of our educational opportunities.



### AS COMMUNITY MEMBERS, WE WILL:

- Model positive behaviour to the school community.
- Treat other members of the school community with respect.
- Support school staff to maintain a safe and orderly learning environment for all students.
- Utilise the school's communications policy to communicate with the school.

### THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT WILL:

- Provide support and advice to principals to equip them to manage and respond to challenging behaviour of students, parents and staff.
- Provide practical guidance and resources to support schools to manage and respond to challenging behaviour of students, parents and staff.
- Provide practical guidance and resources to support schools respond to and prevent bullying and promote cyber-safety and wellbeing.
- Provide access to evidence based resources and strategies to increase student safety, wellbeing and engagement.
- Provide schools with practical and legal support as required.
- Provide parents with practical guidance and resources to resolve conflicts with the school.

## CONSEQUENCES FOR FAILING TO UPHOLD THE STATEMENT OF VALUES

### UNREASONABLE BEHAVIOURS

Behaviours that are considered inappropriate on and adjacent to school grounds or in relation to school business and that do not uphold the principles of this Statement of Values include when a person:

- is rude, aggressive or harasses others
- sends rude, confronting or threatening letters, emails or text messages
- is manipulative or threatening
- speaks in an aggressive tone, either in person or over the telephone
- makes sexist, racist or derogatory comments
- inappropriately uses social media as a forum to raise concerns/make complaints against the school
- is physically intimidating, e.g. standing very close.

### CONSEQUENCES

Principals are responsible for determining what constitutes reasonable and unreasonable behaviour.

Unreasonable behaviour and/or failure to uphold the principles of this Statement of Values may lead to further investigation and the implementation of appropriate consequences. This may include:

- utilising mediation and counselling services
- alternative communication strategies being applied
- formal notice preventing entry onto school premises or attendance at school activities. Written notice will follow any verbal notice given.
- an intervention order being sought
- informing the police which may result in a charge of trespass or assault

By agreeing to meet specified standards of positive behaviour, everyone in our school community can be assured that they will be treated with fairness and respect. In turn, this will help to create a school that is safe and orderly, where everyone is empowered to participate and learn.



### Communication Checklist

WHO	ABOUT	FOR EXAMPLE...	HOW
<b>Class Teacher</b>	<p>Your child's learning progress or social, behavioural or emotional issues.</p> <p><b>Important:</b> It is not appropriate to raise an issue face-to-face during school hours as this does not allow the teacher to give you their full attention or pay due consideration to the issue.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Absences</li> <li>* Positive feedback</li> <li>* Playground issues</li> <li>* Homework, including at-home reading</li> <li>* Not wanting to go to school</li> <li>* Queries about excursions and class events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Email school or or Tiqbiz absence App</li> <li>* Written note</li> <li>* Face-to-face meeting (Contact teacher prior, giving sufficient time to arrange a mutually suitable time and for teacher to gather relevant data or observations)</li> </ul> <p><b>Response time</b> - Most routine communication acknowledged within 2 school days. More complex issues require some investigation and consultation and may take up to 5 school days</p>
<b>Year Level Coordinator</b>	<p>Your child's learning progress or social, behavioural or emotional issues, if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* You see the issue as a year-level-wide concern,</li> <li>* Students from several classes are involved</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Playground or bullying issues across classes</li> <li>* Positive feedback for the team</li> <li>* Clarification about curriculum/learning units</li> <li>* Inconsistent messages/expectations from teachers across the team</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Email</li> <li>* Written note</li> <li>* Face-to-face meeting (Possibly also involving your child's teacher)</li> <li>* Phone message via the office</li> </ul> <p><b>Response time</b> - Acknowledged within 2 school days with proposed further steps, if necessary</p>
<b>Assistant Principal</b>	<p>Your child's learning progress or social, behavioural or emotional issues, if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* You feel you have unsuccessfully tried other channels</li> <li>* The issue is school-wide</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* School policy</li> <li>* Complex student issues</li> <li>* Bullying/ Cyber bullying</li> <li>* Major curriculum issues</li> <li>* Student welfare (eg. Psychology or speech pathology, integration aides)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Email</li> <li>* Written letter</li> <li>* Phone call</li> <li>* If necessary, arrange a meeting</li> </ul> <p><b>Response time</b> - 1-5 school days depending on urgency</p>
<b>Principal</b>	<p>Your child's learning progress or social, behavioural or emotional issues, if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* You feel you have unsuccessfully tried other channels</li> <li>* The issue is school-wide</li> <li>* The issue is serious or confidential in nature</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* School safety issues</li> <li>* Very complex, serious or confidential matters</li> <li>* School management issues</li> <li>* School staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Email</li> <li>* Written letter</li> <li>* Phone call</li> <li>* If necessary, arrange a meeting</li> </ul> <p><b>Response time</b> - 1-5 school days depending on urgency</p>
<b>School Council</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* School-wide issues</li> </ul> <p><b>Important:</b> School Council is not responsible for any teacher-specific matters such as employment, nor does it discuss individual issues between teachers, parents and students as these are the responsibility of the Principal.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Grounds and safety, including buildings and environment and OHS</li> <li>* School communication and community engagement</li> <li>* Finance and budgets</li> <li>* Outsourced programs, including Junior Rockers, school lunch orders and OSHS (Camp Australia)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Email</li> <li>* Written letter to School Council President or School Council members</li> </ul> <p><b>Response time</b> - Timing will be in line with the next monthly School Council meeting</p>
<b>(PA) Parent's Association</b>	<p>Questions or comments regarding PA and PA functioning, community/ parent engagement, school culture or Class Representatives (each class has one or more PA-affiliated Class Reps).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Fundraising</li> <li>* Social events</li> <li>* Communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Discussion, email with Class Representative (See class contact list)</li> </ul> <p><b>Response time</b> - 1-5 school days depending on urgency</p>
<b>School Office</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* School administration issues</li> <li>* The School Office is often the first point of contact for parents and they'll happily assist in filtering and channelling requests and concerns to the right people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* OHS, including immediate repair works</li> <li>* School fees and payments</li> <li>* Arranging meetings with AP/Principal</li> <li>* Urgent messages for staff or students</li> <li>* General school-related questions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Phone call or email (preferred)</li> <li>* Face-to-face</li> </ul> <p><b>Response time</b> - The School Office gets extremely busy, particular before and after school, and staff make every attempt to promptly assist visitors, however phone or email contact is preferred. Staff will attempt to assist you immediately or asap.</p>

## PARENT COMPLAINT FLOWCHART

