



Complaints (Parent) Policy

Prerequisite DET Policies

Except for the sake of clarity / ease of use, or to satisfy compliance requirements, this policy will not replicate information contained in DET policy. It is understood that all DET policy must be complied with at all times (DET policy takes precedence).

- Decision Making Responsibilities for Students (eg: classification of students as Adult, Mature Minor or Minor)
<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/safety/pages/parentalresponsibility.aspx>
- Mature Minor policy
<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/safety/Pages/matureminor.aspx>

Rationale

Northcote High School (NHS) recognises that it is in the best interest of students for there to be a trusting and cooperative relationship between parent and school.

- NHS values parent feedback about student's experiences, and actively seeks parent engagement through a range of avenues including surveys, community forums, working groups, Parent-Teacher-Student Conversations and direct lines of communication via email, telephone and meetings as appropriate.
- We encourage parents to contact us as early as possible if you have a concern or a question.
- Complaints are an additional and important way for the school community to provide feedback. The school considers that every complaint provides a valuable opportunity for reflection and learning. In most cases, concerns can be best addressed directly by the relevant staff member, and should be raised with that person in the first instance. We understand however, that sometimes this may be unsuitable and this policy outlines the processes parents should use in those instances.

Purpose

- The purpose of this policy is to ensure that parents are informed of how they can make a complaint.
- This policy does not apply to matters where rights and processes for review and appeal already exist. These include:
 - student suspensions or expulsions
 - complaints about staff that if upheld would constitute misconduct
 - student critical incident matters
 - other criminal matters
- This policy provides specific contextualised information about Northcote High School and should be understood to exist within the Department's Complaints Policy. This



policy does not replace or alter the policy or procedures outlined in the Department's Complaints Policy.

- The Department's Complaints Policy which includes information about complaint escalation and the role and processes of the Regional Office and Central Office of the Department can be found at:
<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/parents/complaints/Pages/default.aspx>

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)
 - a person appointed as 'guardian' pursuant to the *Children Youth and Families Act 2005* (Victoria) including Host Parents for International Students
 - International Student parents
 - an informal carer with whom the child normally or regularly resides, and who has day-to-day care and control of the child
 - a mature minor student
 - an adult student, including International & Exchange students
- a **'concern'** is a question or worry about a particular action taken, decision made or service provided, or the failure to provide a service, take action or make a decision. For example:
 - *My child has not received back the results of her test. I am concerned that she does not know what to revise for the upcoming exam.*
- a **'concern'** may also be a technical matter requiring action. For example:
 - *I am unable to access the online assessment feedback and I do not know how my child is progressing.*
- 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. For example:
 - *My child has not received back the results of her test. I have raised this with the teacher and not received a response. It is not fair that she does not know what to revise and I want to know what you intend to do about this!*
- a **'grievance'** is an industrial matter between employees and the employer and are not covered by this policy.
- complaint is considered to be 'resolved' when the complainant and the school agree on an appropriate response or remedy
- a complaint is considered to be 'finalised' when the principal has made a final determination on the matter after exhausting the processes set out in this policy
- a 'delegate' is a person (typically an assistant principal) to whom the Principal has delegated activity associated with complaint resolution. At all times the principal remains responsible for the complaint handling process.



General information about complaints

Parents who have a complaint should, in the first instance, make the complaint to the school, except when the complaint is about the principal. Complaints about the principal should be referred to the North-Western Victoria Region on 9488 9488.

The principal is responsible for the school's complaint-handling processes.

When addressing a complaint it is expected that parents and school personnel 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
- acknowledge cultural backgrounds eg offshore parents / International Students

All staff must observe the code of conduct for Victorian public sector employees.

Protected disclosures

Where a parent has real and substantial concerns that, as a result of raising a complaint, they may suffer a detriment and the allegations relate to corrupt conduct, they may have access to protection under the provisions of the *Protected Disclosure Act 2012* (PD Act). The PD Act defines the types of complaints that may be accepted as complaints under this Act. For further information, see: [Protected Disclosure Act 2012 - Making and Handling Protected Disclosures](#)

Unreasonable complainant conduct

While the principal considers 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, it is appropriate for the principal or their delegate to communicate the basis on which the conclusion was made to the parent in writing. The principal or delegate may also indicate an acceptable procedure for future communication with the parent about their complaint.

Northcote High School and the Department consider 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
- it is oriented toward conflict



Anonymous complaints

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 and this may require the respondent to know the name of the complainant.

NHS staff responsible for handling parent complaints will determine, in consultation with other relevant personnel from the central office or region where appropriate, the extent to which an anonymous complaint received by the school shall be investigated.

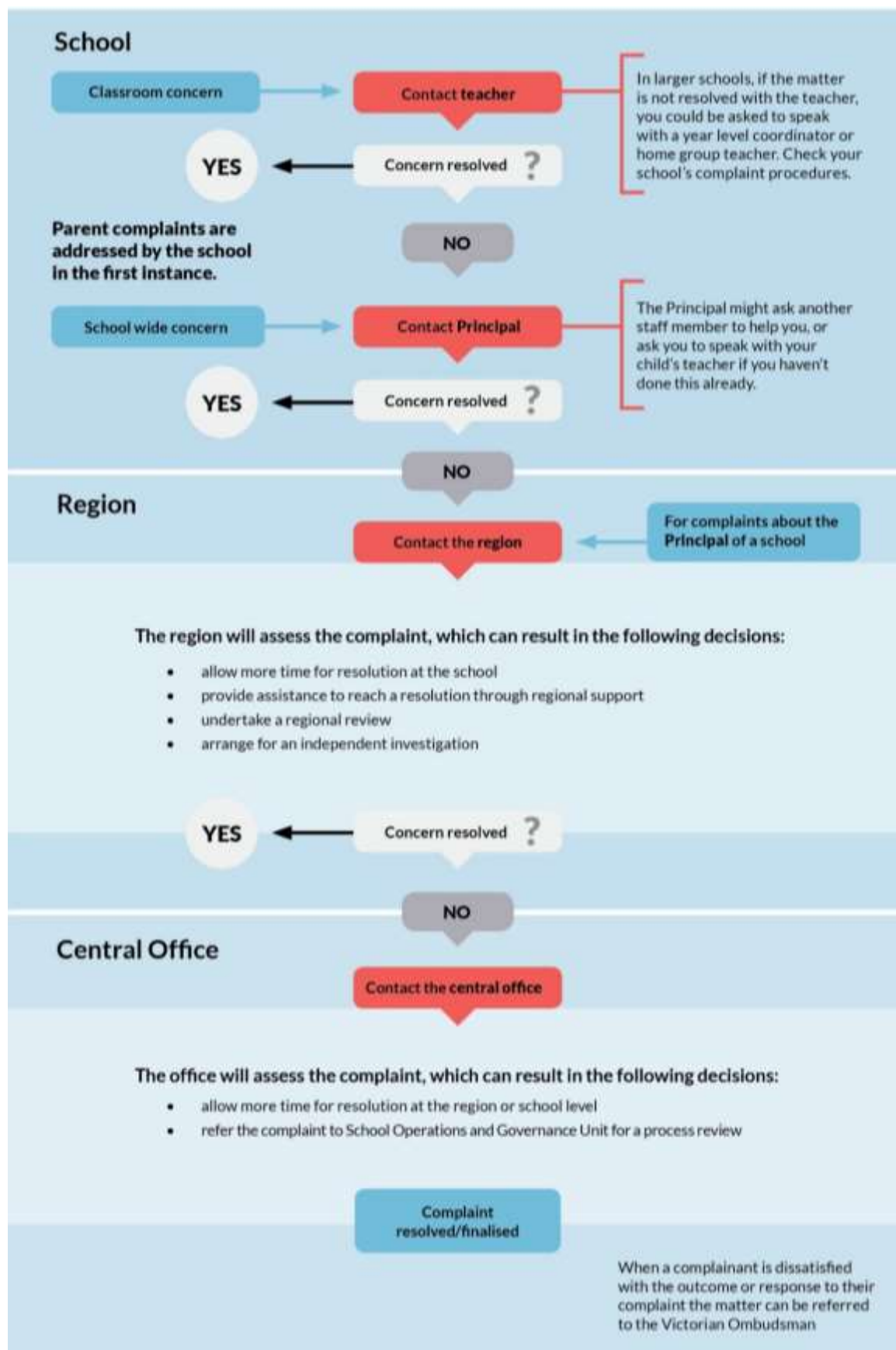
Complaint escalation

When 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 can contact their local region (see above).

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 by the Department.

Parents should be aware that when complaints are sent to specific areas of the Department the complaint may be referred to the relevant level as identified in the following process image.

Department of Education Complaint Escalation Flowchart





Implementation

- The school's Values help to establish a cooperative school environment with realistic expectations of what can be achieved by the school. Open, two-way communication, free of blame, will assist NHS to handle concerns or complaints being raised by a parent.
- Where the matter raised could be classified as a concern, rather than a complaint, the parent may be directed to raising the concern with the relevant staff member directly. However, the parent may request that the matter be handled as a complaint.
- NHS will respond to and address written (letter and email) and verbal (face-to-face and phone) complaints raised by parents except where other regulations, legislation, particulars of this policy or processes (e.g. police action) are in effect.
- Complaints made in writing will be acknowledged and an approximate time-frame for resolution communicated.
- The school will raise the issue identified in the complaint with relevant community members and consult where appropriate, with relevant sections of the Department and/or external agencies for technical or other advice.
- Where appropriate and permitted by regulation, Department policy and or legislation the school will discuss findings with the complainant. The school will never discuss a student with persons other than that child's parents or school / Department staff or other authorised persons including the police.
- When a complaint is finalised parents will be contacted by the relevant decision maker, generally the Principal.
- Complaints and actions taken are recorded and documented.
- At any point of the complaint process complainants 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.



Contact points for parents

Concerns (see definitions) should be raised with the relevant staff member in the first instance. NHS reception (9488 2300) can assist parents to identify the best person to speak with. Language support is available.

If the matter is not resolved with the relevant staff member, please contact one of the following people:

- Head of school (Junior School – Year 7&8 / Middle School – Year 9&10 / Senior School – Year 11&12)
- Assistant Principal (Depending on the nature of the matter a Head of School or Assistant Principal may redirect you to the relevant Assistant Principal team member who manages the relevant portfolio).
- Principal

The Head of School or Assistant Principals will advise the Principal about the matter and the Principal is responsible for the complaints process.

Before you approach your child's teacher or the school:

- be clear about the issues you want to discuss
- focus on the facts and the things that affect your child
- remember you may not have all the facts relating to the matter you want to raise
- think about how the matter could be resolved
- be informed by checking the Department's and the school's policies and guidelines
- be realistic about what the school can do.

Resolving complaints

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

- an apology or expression of regret
- a change of decision policy, procedure or practice
- other support as appropriate in accordance with DET policy.

Where a complaint cannot be resolved the principal may contact the regional director and request the region's intervention to help resolve a complaint. In these cases the parent will be advised that their complaint will be handled by personnel from the region.

Where a complaint cannot be satisfactorily resolved at the school level for international students', the international student (or their parents/legal guardian) can escalate a complaint to the DET International Education Division.

Evaluation

Changes to this policy that are not substantive may be made by the policy owner or the Principal from time-to-time (for example, correcting a grammatical error).

Substantive changes may be made by the policy owner or Principal with immediate effect in response to amended policy guidance from DET. In these circumstances the amended policy will be tabled at the next Governance Committee and/or School Council. This policy will be reviewed as part of the school's three-year review cycle or if guidelines change (latest update May 2018).

Reference

- <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/parents/complaints/Pages/default.aspx>

This policy was ratified by School Council in May 2018.