



## **COMMUNICATION of CONCERNS and COMPLAINTS POLICY**

### **Intention**

The Dandenong Ranges Steiner School values and encourages open communication.

The school's approach to handling concerns and complaints is based on our values of:

- Providing a safe and supportive learning environment
- Building relationships between students, parents and staff
- Continual improvement of the school

Our intention is to create relationships with our parents and community that are sustainable and workable; in essence aspiring to produce the best possible outcomes for all concerned. We will aim to meet the needs of everyone concerned, though it may be that this will not always be achievable in every situation.

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about your child's education, the school, our procedures, etc., we ask that you always initially bring it directly to the individual - teacher, administrator etc. - most immediately concerned.

### **What is a Concern or Complaint?**

A concern or complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about some aspect of your child's schooling.

A concern or complaint could be about:

- a particular incident
- student, teacher or staff behaviour
- a practice, policy or decision (made or not made) that a complainant believes is unfair, unreasonable or inappropriate;

# Treatment of Concerns and Complaints

Any person bringing a concern or complaint can be assured that there will be no blame attached to bringing such issues, as the school aims to maintain a respectful and understanding outlook of each person's point of view, and regards concerns or complaints as an opportunity to improve the school's policies and practices.

## Monitoring of Concerns and complaints

The school will monitor parent concerns and complaints, maintaining a register which includes dates, times, actions taken and outcomes.

Apart from keeping a record of issues, this register will be used in the regular process of reviewing policies, procedures and practices so as to continually improve the education being provided by the school.

## Who is responsible for what?

### TEACHERS

- Classroom management
- Implementation of the Curriculum
- Care of the students

### COLLEGE OF TEACHERS

- Educational policy
- Curriculum
- Teaching staff
- School development
- Professional development.

### COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT

- Finances,
- General staff
- Governance
- Management of school properties.

## Expectations of Parents

The school asks that a person raising a concern:

- do so promptly, as soon as possible after the issue occurs
- provide detailed 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.

## Expectations of the School

The school will:

- provide a timely response to any concern or complaint
- record the concern or complaint
- put in place a procedure for acting on the concern or complaint
- maintain and respect the privacy and confidentiality of all parties
- show respect and understanding of all points of view and value difference, rather than judge and blame
- recognise that all parties have rights and responsibilities which must be balanced.

## Methods of Raising Concerns

Text messages and emails, despite their convenience and usefulness in providing information, are so often inadequate in ensuring effective communication between individuals.

Communications should be person to person, as it is important to meet each other in such a way as to ensure the best possible understanding and outcomes.

We believe an arranged meeting is the best way to discuss significant questions or issues.

Written communication of issues or concerns may be necessary, if the initial meeting process steps have failed to resolve the issue satisfactorily (see Steps in the **Communicating Concerns Procedures**) or if the matter is sufficiently serious to bypass the usual steps (see **Serious Issues** - following on from Steps in the Process)

## How to Raise Concerns

To bring a straightforward question or concern to a member of staff, please speak to them at an appropriate time.

If it is a question/concern for a teacher, an appropriate time would be either after school or by phone - but not just before school, when the teacher has to focus on the children and the morning ahead.

For any matter requiring more than a few minutes you should follow the Communicating Concerns Procedures below in making a time for a meeting.

## COMMUNICATING CONCERNS PROCEDURES

There are two procedures which follow:

- A procedure for issues which are the responsibility of a teacher or the College of Teachers
- A procedure for issues which are the responsibility of the Committee of Management

### Procedure for issues which are the responsibility of teachers or the College of Teachers:

#### STEPS IN THE PROCESS:

Step 1: If you wish to raise an issue with a teacher, you can do so after school or, by arranging an appointment at the school, with the teacher to address your issue. (see the **STEP 1 DETAILED PROCESS** below)

Step 2: If, after an adequate amount of time has been allowed to address the issue, you feel the issue has still not been resolved, you may request a meeting a representative of College, yourself and the teacher involved to examine the concerns and determine a process of resolution. You may bring a support person of your choice to this meeting (see the **STEP 2 DETAILED PROCESS** below)

Step 3: Failing a resolution after steps 1 and 2 have been followed the issue should be put in writing, addressed to the Educational Administrator or College Chair who will determine the next steps in the process.

The College Chair or Educational Administrator accordingly will then report back to you as soon as is possible with the next steps in the process. (see the STEP 3 DETAILED PROCESS below)

## Serious Issues:

If an issue is of such seriousness that you feel unable to bring it to the teacher involved, you can contact either the Educational Administrator or College Chair, preferably in writing, who will determine whether the matter needs to go to a particular step in the process, or whether an entirely different procedure is required.

An example of such a procedure would be if an investigation needed to be implemented due to an allegation of abuse of a student.

### STEP 1 DETAILED PROCESS

1. A fruitful discussion requires a proper time and place, and the teacher's full concentration for individual attention. You can speak to them after school - if it is a relatively brief matter - or arrange an appointment either by:
  - a) speaking to them
  - b) putting a message in their pocket
  - c) sending an email to the office (with an attached letter containing the question/concern) requesting that this letter be forwarded to the teacher/staff member in question.

Bear in mind that Tuesdays after school is Faculty meeting and Thursdays after school is the College meeting). When arranging an appointment be mindful of what you would like to achieve as a result, though that could also be discussed at the meeting.

2. At the appointed time come to the meeting prepared with a clear statement of intention:
  - I'm concerned because ...
  - What I'd like is...
  - The outcome I'd like is...
  - I just want you to know ...
3. The discussion should conclude with an agreement as to the outcome, which might include specific actions and a timeframe (perhaps one to two

weeks) before a review meeting to check if a satisfactory outcome has been achieved.

4. After the agreed time, the parent will meet again with the teacher/staff member to review outcomes and whether they are heading in the desired direction. This process could be repeated with a longer period of time (two to four weeks) before a further review.

## STEP 2 DETAILED PROCESS

1. If you believe this matter has not been adequately addressed after the period agreed, and you feel that mediation would be advantageous, you may request a meeting with a member of College to meet with both parties together to identify the areas of concern. A strategy for moving forward will be devised and a period for review set for an appropriate number of weeks. It is important to be clear as to the issue so multiple different matters are not being brought to this meeting.
2. After the review period has elapsed, the parties should again meet to determine that the matters have been resolved.

## STEP 3 DETAILED PROCESS

1. Failing a resolution, and after steps 1 & 2 have been followed you may put the matter in writing, clearly and concisely, and forward a hard copy marked to the attention of either the College Chair or the Educational Administrator, who will then determine on a course of action to be taken, which will be reported back to the person raising the issue, with a timeframe given, during which the College, or its representatives, will aim to resolve the issue.
2. It may be that further mediation is required, including the possibility that external mediation (see Conclusion) will be either requested or deemed to be necessary.

## Support Person

If you wish, you may bring a support person to a meeting. The role of the support person is to provide you with personal and moral support. The support person acts as a witness to the process, but may not intervene during the meeting, direct the process, answer questions on behalf of, or act as an advocate for, the person bringing the complaint.

# Procedure for issues which are the responsibility of the Committee of Management:

## STEPS IN THE PROCESS:

- Step 1: If you wish to ask a question, raise an issue, or bring a concern or complaint, arrange an interview with either a member of the Committee - ideally, with the Committee member responsible for that area in which you have a concern, or with the Chair of the Committee. A timeframe will be established if required, to allow time for the issue to be resolved satisfactorily, and a follow-up meeting arranged.
- Step 2: If, after the follow-up meeting, the issue is still not resolved the Committee Member will raise the issue at a Committee Meeting.
- Step 3: The Committee will discuss the issue and report back to the person who raised it and the person it concerns within 4 weeks. (The response time varies due to the committee of management only meeting each fortnight).

## DETAILED PROCESS

- Steps 1&2: This would follow the same principles - as outlined above - for issues which are the responsibility of the College.
- Step 3: Failing a resolution, and after steps 1 & 2 have been followed, the person raising the issue should put it in writing, clearly and concisely, and forward a hard copy marked to the attention of the Chair of the Committee of Management.

## SUMMARY

It is possible that not all concerns may be resolved to the complete satisfaction of all parties. There will be a range of matters that the College and Committee will need take into consideration and solutions have to fit within the overall needs of the school as a whole, as well as the needs and rights of individuals and groups.

It is our intention to create long term sustainable relationships and aspire to produce the best possible outcomes for all concerned within the context of

conducting our school in accordance with the principles of Steiner Education and we will make every effort to carry out this responsibility.

## Further Avenues for concerns or complaints

If, after having gone through the aforementioned processes, the person(s) bringing the concerns or complaints believe the issue is still not resolved satisfactorily, there are various external organisations to which concerns or complaints can be made and which can also provide remediation services if required.

These organisations include:

- Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission
- Independent Schools of Victoria
- Ombudsman's Office
- Victorian Institute of Teaching
- Human Rights Commission
- Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority.