

Your government school acknowledges the concerns of its community members and welcomes any questions you have. Your School Council is committed to responding promptly and helpfully to your enquiries, concerns, complaints, suggestions and compliments.

Communication is an essential factor in any partnership. Positive, clear and effective processes for resolving grievances between the school and community members assists in the building of strong relationships, dispels anxiety and ultimately provides students with an enhanced learning environment

### **Introduction**

Government schools are a part of a complex community that, 'inside the gate', includes students, teachers, specialist and non-teaching staff, parents and other family members. 'Outside the gate' the community broadens to include school neighbours, local businesses, local, state and federal governments, kindergartens, churches, other government and non-government schools, business and education partners and other organisations.

At various times, it is necessary for community members 'outside the gate' to have direct contact with their local school. What is the best way to do this?

In the first instance, contact with the school can be made via a telephone call, e-mail or letter to ascertain the appropriate person to deal with your enquiry. Schools are busy places and unscheduled visits might not lead to a successful resolution. You may want to set up an appointment to see the Principal to discuss your enquiry.

### **Parents/Guardians**

Research shows that the relationship between the home and the school plays a very important part in a child's education. Parents are among the most important influences on the way in which a child approaches learning. The critical role that parents play in successful learning cannot be overestimated

Teachers are responsible for the more formal aspects of children's learning and successful teaching is supported when there is an effective and active partnership with parents.

### **What might you talk to your school about?**

Your child: attitude, progress, attendance, participation, social and emotional matters, Learning Improvement Plan/Individual Learning Plan, Managed Individual Pathway, career advice, access to support services.

The school: School Council Policies and procedures, Codes of Conduct, learning environment, teaching staff, homework, general student behaviour, programs for students experiencing difficulties with learning, or for gifted and talented students.

# COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR SCHOOL

## **STEPS FOR PARENTS**

### **What is the School Council Communications Protocol policy?**

Once the issue is identified and clarified, it is important that you then follow the steps set out in your school's Communications Protocol Policy. This might be a telephone call or e-mail to the teacher to discuss the issue and/or to arrange a meeting. If your concern is about the conduct of a staff member, you may prefer to discuss the matter with an Assistant Principal or the Principal.

Below is a suggestion as to how resolutions to issues, complaints and grievances might be reached.

## **SCHOOL LEVEL RESOLUTION**

### **Stage 1: Discussion with staff member**

If the matter involves your child or an issue of everyday class operation, an initial enquiry to the classroom teacher might be via telephone or e-mail. An appointment to see the classroom teacher can then follow if necessary. The staff will work with you to resolve the problem.

### **Stage 2: Review or investigation at the school level – Principal**

If the matter concerns a staff member or another member of the 'inside the gate' community, contact the principal who will work with you to resolve the problem. If you wish to formalize your complaint, do so in writing. The Principal will acknowledge the complaint with a written reply as soon as possible, even if a resolution is not available at this stage.

The Principal will consider the issues and identify what action is to be taken. The Principal may also seek the support of the Regional Director or other relevant Regional staff and will advise you of any actions to be taken.

### **Stage 3: Review or investigation at the school level – School Council**

If the matter concerns school policies, eg uniform policy, contact your School Council President via the school. After initial discussions you may want to formalize your complaint by writing to School Council. If School Council regards the issue as an operational matter it will be referred to the Principal who acts as Executive Officer to the Council.

If the issue is regarded as a governance matter it will be dealt with in Council and your letter will be acknowledged with a written reply as soon as possible, even if a resolution is not available at this stage. You will be further advised on any course of action.

### **Information that is available from the school:**

- School Information Handbook
- Information on state legislation, DE&T policies and regulations
- School Council policies, for example, homework, discipline, excursions, uniform, charges and contributions
- Course and programme details
- Information about participation in the School Council, parents' associations and other community groups within the school.

### **How your school may communicate with you:**

It is the responsibility of the Principal to ensure that parents are regularly provided with comprehensive information related to the operation of the school and associated matters related to the educational development of their children: *(Making the Partnership Work: Roles and Responsibilities, Department of Education, Employment and Training, Victoria, 2001, p.39)*

Information may be in the form of:

- Written reports or portfolios on your child's progress
- Notes, surveys, regular information through newsletters, including information from the Department of Education and Training (DE&T)
- Annual Report public meeting
- Parent-teacher interviews, parent information booklets, parent information sessions, special training programs such as 'Assertive Discipline for Parents'
- Assemblies, sport and special events, celebrations and displays of students' work
- By telephone or e-mail

### **What can you do if you have a problem?**

Seeking information and clarifying an issue as early as possible can solve many problems. Try to identify the problem and establish the facts as clearly as you can before going to the school. Be wary of third hand information or gossip.

Decide whether the problem is a concern, a query or a complaint. This will help in finding a solution. Once you have identified the issue/s, try to stay calm. Even if you don't feel it, being calm will help you get your concerns across more clearly than if you are upset or angry.

## REGIONAL LEVEL RESOLUTION

### Stage 4: Regional resolution

If resolution is not reached at the school level, contact the Regional Director at your Regional education office for assistance in resolving the issues. This will involve an independent review of the situation and may include mediation. The Regional Directors can be contacted through your Regional DE&T office.

## CENTRAL RESOLUTION

### Stage 5: Formal Complaints

In those exceptional circumstances where a formal process is required, the complaint can be forwarded to:

Secretary of Education  
Department of Education & Training

## CONTACTS

- **ASCIV**  
PO Box 346  
Bunwood 3125  
Ph 98082499 Fax 98082199  
asciv@asciv.org.au  
www.asciv.org.au
- **Department of Education & Training**  
GPO Box 4367 Melbourne 3001  
Ph 96372000  
www.det.vic.gov.au

Your local Regional Office  
contact details  
will be included here

## COMPLAINT RESOLUTION FLOW CHART

Wherever possible it is preferable for all concerned that matters be dealt with at the school level

Could the class teacher help?

Arrange a meeting and discuss  
**Resolved** ✓



Could the Assistant Principal/Year Level Co-Ordinator help?

Arrange a meeting and discuss  
**Resolved** ✓



Could the Principal help?

Arrange a meeting and discuss  
**Resolved** ✓



Could the School Council President help?

Arrange a meeting and discuss  
**Resolved** ✓



Could the Regional Director help?

Arrange a meeting and discuss  
**Resolved** ✓



Secretary of Education

Get this brochure for FREE



Useful information for  
school community members  
with enquiries, concerns  
or complaints

Your school/college  
contact details will  
be included here

Association of  
School Councils in Victoria

# COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR SCHOOL

