



PARENT COMPLAINTS POLICY

Sunshine Harvester Primary School (further SHPS) recognises that it is in the best interest of students for there to be a trusting and cooperative relationship between parent and school. Complaints are an important way for the school community to provide information and feedback to the school. The school considers that every complaint provides a valuable opportunity for reflection and learning. SHPS recognises a parent's right to make a complaint and its responsibility to provide a framework within which efforts can be made to resolve complaints. Parent complaints are best handled at the school level in an environment where parents feel able to speak up about issues concerning the education of their children. An effective complaint-handling system has a clear process for resolving complaints, treats people fairly, is timely and provides those people involved in a complaint with a fair opportunity to respond to issues and to present their views.

Purpose of this policy

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that:

- the school meets its obligation to respond to parent complaints in a fair, effective and efficient manner
- parents are informed of how they can make a complaint at the school.

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.

Role of the school

SHPS believes that parent complaints are best addressed in an environment where parents feel able to speak up about issues concerning the education and welfare of their children. This is reflected in open, two-way communication within the school, clear roles and responsibilities for all members of the school community, realistic expectations about what can be achieved by the school and an effective, published complaints handling procedure.

The school will treat parent concerns seriously and reflect on the issues raised through complaints to change its practice and improve the learning opportunities for its students. It is the responsibility of the school to respond to and address written (letter and email) and verbal (face-to-face and phone) complaints raised by parents from the school community.

The school will follow the process outlined below when a complaint (either written or verbal) is received from a parent:

- The school will provide and maintain complaint-handling procedures including:
 - who to contact when making a complaint
 - a description of the actions the school will take once a complaint is received
 - a time frame for acknowledging written complaints and an expected time frame for complaint resolution
 - the types of outcomes that the parent could expect
 - information about what the school will do if the complaint is not able to be resolved by the school and the options the parent has to take their complaint further
- The school will consider all parent complaints by:
 - raising the issues in the complaint with relevant staff and/or members of the school community
 - consulting, where appropriate, with relevant sections of the Department and/or external agencies for technical or other advice
 - discussing the school's findings with the parent in an attempt to reach an agreed resolution
 - considering the engagement of a mediator where a complaint has the potential to become intractable
- publicise the school's complaint-handling procedures within the school community and make them readily available
- review the school's complaint-handling procedures regularly
- ensure that complaints received are recorded and actions taken to resolve the complaint are well documented
- ensure a school record of all complaints, both written and verbal, is maintained at the school
- seek advice from either the central office or region about the management of complaints, including complex or challenging complaints or complainants and the use of mediation/conciliation services, and seek specialist or technical advice from external agencies and/or the Department when required.
- ensure all school personnel are aware of the school's parent complaint-handling procedures and provide opportunities for staff to attend training/professional development activities with a focus on complaint management.
- 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.

Complaint escalation

- Parents should be made aware that they 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.
- Families of International fees paying students should be made aware that if issues not resolved by Sunshine Harvester Primary School or family not satisfied by dispute resolution, family may contact International Education Division on 03 9637 2990 or via email: international@edumail.vic.gov.au
- When it is unlikely that a complaint will be resolved using the school's complaint-handling procedures the principal should consider seeking advice from the relevant region.
- 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. For further information, see: [Role of the region](#)
- 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.
- It may not always be possible to resolve all complaints to the parent's satisfaction. This could happen when the nature of the issues raised in the complaint is governed by the Department's policies or guidelines or if the parent has unrealistic expectations about the outcome of their complaint.
- Parents should be made aware that 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 following process image.

Resolving complaints

A principal may contact the regional director and request the region's intervention to help resolve a complaint. The principal would need to have exhausted the school's parent complaint-handling procedures and be of the belief that the complaint would not be able to be resolved at the school level. The parent would be advised that their complaint will be handled by personnel from the region.

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

- an apology or expression of regret
- 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.

Related legislation

All concerns and complaints must be addressed in line with the Department's legislative and regulatory framework which includes:

- *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*
- *Education and Training Reform Regulations 2007*
- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*
- *Protected Disclosure Act 2012*
- *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*
- *Wrongs Act 1958*

SHPS Parent Complaint Process

