



POLICY STATEMENT: RAISING CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS

A guide for the school community

1. *The School's values*

The values of our school have for some years centred upon five concepts:

- Respect
- Responsibility
- Achievement
- Recognition
- Belonging

The school's approach to handling concerns and complaints is based on our values of providing a safe and supportive environment and building relationships between students, staff and parents

2. *Concerns and complaints covered by these procedures*

This policy deals with dissatisfaction requiring resolution by the school, such as:

- issues of student behaviour which is contrary to the school's code of conduct
- incidents of bullying or harassment taking place at school
- learning programs, assessment and reporting of student learning
- the school's communication channels with parents
- school fees and payments, or other administrative issues

This policy does not cover matters covered by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Developments existing rights of review or appeal. It does not therefore cover matters such as:

- student discipline matters involving expulsions
- complaints about DEECD employee conduct which should be dealt with by performance management, grievance resolution or disciplinary action
- complaints by DEECD employees about their employment
- student critical incidents such as criminal matters

3. *Ownership and scope*

This policy and the procedures it outlines will continue to be developed in collaboration with the school's governing parent body, the School Council, and the wider school community. The policy is available on the school's website, www.seymourths.vic.edu.au

Further input from the school community is welcomed via the school's email, seymour.technical.hs@edumail.vic.gov.au

This policy takes effect from July, 2009, and has been endorsed by School Council.

4. *Expectations*

The school expects that a person raising a complaint or concern will:

- do so promptly, as soon as possible after the issue arises
- provide complete and factual information about the concern or complaint
- maintain and respect the privacy and confidentiality of parties involved
- acknowledge that the 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

5. *Raising concerns or complaints*

In the first instance, a complaint or expression of concern (regarding the matters outlined in section 2, above) should be made to the school.

The complainant should telephone, visit, email (see above) or write to:

- the student's level co-ordinator, concerning learning issues or incidents which happened in classes or groups; for most student issues, the level co-ordinator should be seen as first point of contact
- the student's sub-school manager, concerning issues to do with courses of study, class groupings, or more severe incidents occurring in classes or groups
- an Assistant Principal, concerning issues relating to staff members, or complex student issues. (Junior School – Miss Sally-Ann Venables; Senior School – Mr Jurgen Frank; general issues – Mr David Mills)
- the Principal, Mr Tim McCartin, about issues relating to staff members, school policy and management, or very complex student issues

(For contact details about level co-ordinators or sub-school managers, please call the school's General Office. If complainants are unsure whom to contact, they should again contact the General Office, or Mr David Mills, on the school's telephone number.)

6. *Help with raising concerns or complaints*

Personal support is appropriate in situations where the complainant, or others involved in the complaint process, have emotional issues related to the complaint:

- complainants can seek the services of an advocate, if they feel that they are unable to express their concern clearly
- an advocate can be a friend, or someone from an appropriate support organization, but who does not receive a fee for service
- a complainant who wishes to use such a support service should ensure that the person at STHS addressing the concern is aware of such intention, and is in agreement

7. *Managing/recording parent concerns, and information related to them*

In the case of complaints which are easily and straightforwardly resolved, a brief note in the work diary of the principal's/teacher's diary will be kept.

Other complaints or concerns will be recorded as follows:

- the name and contact details of the complainant
- date
- brief description of the nature of the concern
- details of the school officer responding
- action taken on the complaint and the outcome of such action

8. *Addressing concerns or complaints*

The school will determine whether a concern or complaint should be managed through the school's own processes, or through the complaints processes of the Department. The school will make every effort to resolve issues before involving other levels of the Department.

Any complaint will be acted on promptly by the staff member who receives it.

The school will acknowledge all complaints, either verbally or in writing. We will provide the complainant with a time-frame for investigating the concern. The school will make every attempt to resolve an issue as quickly as possible; if a complaint involves many students or a range of issues, the school will need more time to investigate and resolve it.

Should the complaint involve complex issues, the school may need to take advice from the Department's regional office; this may take more time. The school will keep the complainant informed of the nature of any such delays. In all cases, the school will endeavour to resolve a complex concern or complaint within 20 school days.

9. *Remedies*

If a concern or complaint is substantiated, wholly or partly, the school will offer an appropriate remedy. For example, at its discretion and depending on circumstances, the school might offer:

- an explanation or further information

- counselling, mediation or other support
- apology
- a change to decisions, policies, procedures or practices
- cancellation of a school payment debt, or fee refund, in cases of administrative error

10. Referral of concerns or complaints

If a person with a concern or complaint is not satisfied with the outcome determined by the school, they should contact the Department's Hume Region office in Benalla. The contact is Manager, Stakeholder Relations. The contact number is 0357 612 100.

The officer from Region will ask the complainant for a complete and factual account in writing of the concern, and of the complainant's opinion of why the school did not resolve it satisfactorily.

11. Monitoring the school's complaints and concerns policy

The school, and its School Council, will monitor concerns and complaints and consider issues raised, when undertaking a review of school operations. This information will be reviewed over time to:

- identify common or recurring issues
- assess the effectiveness of the procedure outlined in this policy document
- also use the information provided through the annual parent opinion survey on the views of parents