

Complaints Policy



PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Provide an outline of the complaints process at Ringwood Heights PS so that parents and members of the community are informed of how they can raise complaints or concerns about issues arising at our school
- Ensure that all complaints regarding Ringwood Heights PS are managed in an appropriate manner.

SCOPE

This policy relates to complaints brought by parents, carers, students or members of our school community and applies to all matters relating to our school. In some limited instances, the complainant may be referred to another Department of Education and Training (DET) process where there are different mechanisms in place to review certain decisions.

CODE OF CONDUCT

Unreasonable behaviour

As per DET guidelines (DET, 2016), Ringwood Heights encourages all complaints to be made in good faith. The school will endeavour to resolve the conflict and restore the relationship. If at any time Ringwood Heights PS determines a complainant's behaviour to be unreasonable when processing a complaint, Ringwood Heights PS staff may communicate solely in written correspondence.

Ringwood Heights PS and DET 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, often to cause annoyance to another person
- It is oriented towards conflict
- The frequency of the complaint is deemed excessive or vexatious.

If a complainant is determined to be demonstrating unreasonable conduct, Ringwood Heights PS will determine the basis for further communications.

Anonymous complaints

DET requires all complaints to be considered by schools. 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. Department staff responsible for handling parent complaints should determine, in consultation with other relevant personnel from the central office or region, the extent to which an anonymous complaint received by the school, region or central office shall be investigated.

POLICY

Ringwood Heights PS welcomes feedback and is committed to continuous improvement. We value open communication with our families and we aim to understand complaints and address them appropriately. We recognise that the complaints process provides an important opportunity for reflection and learning.

We value and encourage open and positive relationships with our school community. We understand that it is in the best interests of students for there to be a trusting relationship between families and our school.

When addressing a complaint or grievance, it is expected that all parties will:

- Follow the Complaints Process as identified below (see: Figure 1)
- Pursue complaints in a manner according to our Code of Conduct.
- Acknowledge that the goal is to achieve a mutually acceptable outcome that is in the best interests of the student
- Consider the privacy and confidentiality of those involved
- Acknowledge that all parties, including the broader school community, have rights and responsibilities that must be balanced
- Recognise that schools and the Department may be subject to legal constraints on their ability to act or disclose information in some circumstances.
- Some complaints may be referred to the School Council as a means of responding appropriately.

Preparation for raising a concern or complaint

Ringwood Heights encourages parents, carers or members of the community who may wish to submit a complaint to:

- Carefully consider the issues to be discussed
- Consider whether all facts relating to the issue are clear
- Identify some potential solutions as to how the matter could be resolved
- Check the policies and guidelines set by the Department and by the school.

Complaints process

I. Grievances (Low Level)

Parents will approach all conversations regarding grievances with respectful conduct and confidentiality. Grievances can be followed up with your child's teacher. If not resolved, contact Learning Team Leaders.

Where concerns cannot be resolved in this way, parents or community members may wish to make a formal complaint to members of School Leadership, including the Assistant Principals or the Principal.

II. Formal complaints

In cases where grievances are not adequately addressed by the classroom teacher or the Learning Team Leader, parents and carers can make a formal complaint to the school Leadership team. Complaints will need to be made in writing in all cases and will need to be submitted with the understanding that the complaint will be dealt with in a timely manner.

Formal complaints will be dealt with by members of School Leadership in the following process:

- a. Complaint is received by the school in writing.
- b. Assistant Principal or Principal will arrange, through phone or written correspondence, to gather information that pertains to the complaint. Note that this process may require input from others within the school community.
- c. The Assistant Principal or Principal will aim to resolve the issue and restore the relationship for the benefit of the affected child.

If this procedure does not result in a mutually satisfactory arrangement, the Assistant Principal or the Principal can work with the complainant to produce a written summary of actions taken so far.

Timelines

Ringwood Heights PS will acknowledge receipt of a complaint as soon as possible (usually within 48 hours) and will seek to resolve complaints in a timely manner. Depending on the complexity of the complaint, additional time to gather further information may be needed. Ringwood Heights PS will endeavour to complete the investigation process and hold a resolution meeting (where appropriate) within 10 working days of the complaint being raised. In situations where further time is required, Ringwood Heights PS will consult with the parent and discuss any interim solutions to the dispute that can be put in place.

Resolution

Where appropriate, Ringwood Heights PS may seek to resolve a complaint by:

- An apology or expression of regret
- A change of decision
- A change of policy, procedure or practice pending Council approval
- Offering the opportunity for student counselling or other support
- Other actions consistent with school values that are intended to support the student, parent and school relationship, engagement, and participation in the school community.

In some circumstances, Ringwood Heights PS may also ask the parent to attend a meeting with an independent third party, or participate in a mediation with an accredited mediator to assist in the resolution of the dispute.

Escalation

If a parent or community member is not satisfied that their complaint has been resolved by the school, or if their complaint is about the Principal, then the complaint should be referred to the North Eastern Region by contacting the Department of Education.

Ringwood Heights PS may also refer a complaint to the North Eastern Region if we believe that we have done all we can to address the complaint.

For more information about the Department's *Parent Complaints* policy, including the role of the Regional Office, please see: Parent complaints policy.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

- *Parent Code of Conduct Policy*, Ringwood Heights Primary School
- *Parent Complaint Flowchart* diagram (see attached)
- DET, 2016. Parents Complaint Policy.

COMPLAINTS PROCESS:

Figure 1: Complaints Process Flowchart

Source: State of Victoria (Department of Education and Training) 2016

COMPLAINTS MANAGEMENT FLOWCHART

