

COMPLAINTS POLICY

This policy aligns with the Victorian Department of Education and Training (“Department”) Parent Complaints Policy and is specific to complaints handling at Manifold Heights Primary School. The Department’s full policy can be accessed at: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/parents/complaints/Pages/default.aspx>

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to:

- provide an outline of the complaints process at Manifold Heights Primary School 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 Manifold Heights Primary School are managed in a timely, effective, fair and respectful 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, we may need to refer the complainant to another Department process where there are different mechanisms in place. Examples include expulsion appeals, staff performance or misconduct, critical incidents, and criminal matters.

POLICY

Manifold Heights Primary School welcomes feedback, both positive and negative, and is committed to continuous improvement. We value open communication with our families and are committed to understanding complaints and addressing 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, it is expected that all parties will:

- raise and discuss issues in a courteous and respectful manner;
- acknowledge that the goal is to achieve an outcome that is in the affected party’s best interests and acceptable to all parties;
- act in good faith and respect the privacy and confidentiality of those involved, as appropriate;
- recognise that all parties, including the broader school community, have rights and responsibilities that must be balanced;
- respect the obligation to operate within applicable legislation;
- recognise that school and the Department may be subject to legal constraints on their ability to act or disclose information in some circumstances.

Preparation for raising a concern or complaint

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

- carefully consider the issues you would like to discuss;
- remember you may not have all the facts relating to the issues that you want to raise;
- think about how the matter could be resolved;
- be informed by checking the policies and guidelines set by the Department and Manifold Heights Primary School.

Support Person

At any point in the complaint process parents are able to be supported by an advocate/support person. Additional support is available to parents with particular needs including translations and interpreters.

Students with a disability

Manifolds Heights Primary School strives to support all students equally. As with all complaints to which this policy applies, parents should raise any concerns or complaints regarding the treatment of a student with a disability with the school in the first instance. The community liaison officer or the regional disabilities coordinator can also provide advice to parents when they are seeking to raise a concern or make a complaint at their school.

Complaints process

Manifold Heights Primary School is always happy to discuss with parents/carers and community members any concerns that they may have. Concerns in the first instance should be directed to the classroom teacher or team leader where appropriate but can also be directed to the Assistant Principal or Principal.

Where possible, school staff will work with you to ensure that your concerns are appropriately addressed. Where concerns cannot be resolved in this way, parents or community members may wish to make a formal complaint to the Assistant Principal or Principal.

If you would like to make a formal complaint, in most cases, depending on the nature of the complaint raised, our school will first seek to understand the issues and will then convene a resolution meeting with the aim of resolving the complaint together. The following process will apply:

1. **Complaint received:** Please either email, telephone or arrange a meeting through the front office with the Assistant Principal or Principal, to outline your complaint so that we can fully understand what the issues are. We can discuss your complaint in a way that is convenient for you, whether in writing, in person or over the phone.
2. **Information gathering:** Depending on the issues raised in the complaint, the Assistant Principal, Principal or nominee may need to gather further information to properly understand the situation. This process may also involve speaking to others to obtain details about the situation or the concerns raised. We will not disclose “personally identifiable information” about a parent/carer unless it is essential to progressing the complaint.
3. **Response:** Where possible, a resolution meeting will be arranged with the [Assistant Principal/Principal] to discuss the complaint with the objective of reaching a resolution satisfactory to all parties. If after the resolution meeting we are unable to resolve the complaint together you may decide to escalate your complaint (see Escalation).

Where a resolution meeting is not convenient or not appropriate a response to the complaint will be provided in writing.

4. **Timelines:** Manifold Heights Primary School will acknowledge receipt of your 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, Manifold Heights Primary School may need some time to gather enough information to fully understand the circumstances of your complaint. We will endeavour to complete any necessary information gathering and hold a resolution meeting where appropriate within 10 working days of the complaint being raised. In situations where further time is required, Manifold Heights Primary School will consult with you and discuss any interim solutions to the dispute that can be put in place.
5. **Accountability:** Schools are required to ensure that complaints received are recorded and actions taken to resolve the complaint are well documented.

Note: See Appendix for a graphical representation of the complaints process.

Resolution

Where appropriate, Manifold Heights Primary School may seek to resolve a complaint by:

- an apology or expression of regret
- a change of decision
- a change of policy, procedure or practice
- 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, mediation or conciliation services may be appropriate. If advised by the Department's Regional or Central Office, Manifold Heights Primary School may ask you to participate in mediation with an accredited mediator to assist in the resolution of a 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 Education Department South West Victoria Geelong Regional Office by contacting phone 52251015. A Community Liaison Officer will help you register your complaint and explain how your complaint will be considered.

In order to resolve a complaint, Manifold Heights Primary School may also request help from the Education Department South West Victoria Geelong Regional Office if we believe that we have done all we can to address the complaint at school level. You will be advised if your complaint is to be handled by personnel from the Regional Office.

Parents are able to take their complaint to the Independent Office for School Dispute Resolution 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.

Parents are able to take their complaint to the Victorian Ombudsman if they are dissatisfied with the outcome or response from the Independent Office for School Dispute Resolution, or if they feel their complaint is not being handled properly or in a timely manner.

Costs

There is no cost to the parent / career for access to the complaint-handling process.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

Before Making a Complaint	www.education.vic.gov.au/school/parents/complaints/Pages/before.aspx
How to Make a Complaint	www.education.vic.gov.au/school/parents/complaints/Pages/procedure.aspx
Not Satisfied with the School's Response to Your Complaint?	www.education.vic.gov.au/school/parents/complaints/Pages/escalate.aspx
Frequently Asked Questions	www.education.vic.gov.au/school/parents/complaints/Pages/faqs.aspx

REVIEW PERIOD

This policy was last updated in September 2018 and is scheduled for review in September 2020.

