Addressing Parents’ Concerns and Complaints
Policy and Procedures

This policy has been developed in line with Office For Government School Education publication, “Addressing parents’ concerns and complaints effectively: policy and guides” The policy does not apply to matters about which there are existing rights of (and processes for) review or appeal.* This policy is not applicable where a complainant has employed another party such as a solicitor to represent them. In such cases, the concern or complaint should be referred to the Department’s Legal Services Branch for their assessment.

*These matters must be managed in line with the procedures detailed in the Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide, and would include student expulsions, complaints about staff that if upheld would constitute misconduct, student critical incident matters, other criminal matters.

DEFINITIONS
‘parent.’ in relation to a child, includes a guardian and every person who has parental responsibility for the child, and any person with whom a child normally or regularly resides.

‘concern’ is an issue of interest raised informally in order to change or improve a situation.

‘complaint’ is an expression of grievance or resentment where the complainant is seeking redress or justice.

COLLEGE VALUES
South Oakleigh College’s approach to handling concerns and complaints is based on aspects of our Mission Statement which includes Values such as Respect, Responsibility and Resilience.

GENERAL EXPECTATIONS
Concerns and complaints are best addressed by students, parents, teachers, principals and support staff working in partnership. Furthermore, the Department and consequently, South Oakleigh College, expect that all parties will:

• Maintain confidentiality of all parties
• Acknowledge that their 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.

In addition, the College will address complaints:

• Courteously
• Efficiently
• Fairly
• Promptly, within timelines agreed with the person with the concern or complaint (where possible within 20 school days)
• In accordance with due process and where appropriate, the principles of natural justice and the Department’s regulatory framework.
The College expectation of parents with concerns or complaints is to abide by the General Expectations, whilst also having the responsibility to:

• Raise the complaint promptly, as soon as possible after the issue occurs
• Provide complete and factual information about the concern or complaint.

A complainant is entitled to an advocate who can be a friend, colleague or person provided through an appropriate support agency who does not receive a fee for service. Threatening or violent behaviour cannot be tolerated.

RAISING CONCERNS OR COMPLAINTS
In the first instance the concern or complaint should be raised at the school level. The Principal determines appropriate complaint procedure after due consideration of the issues raised by the complainant.

The complainant should either, telephone, write or make an appointment to visit the appropriate College staff member when raising either a concern or complaint.

The College has a tiered structure regarding concerns and complaints:

• Classroom teachers and /or Home Group staff are best placed to resolve issues relating to student learning and specific incidents that happened in their class or group.
• The Sub School Manager is best placed for issues involving students of several classes, or if resolution has not been possible with class group issues.
• The Sub School Leader should be the next contact point in these situations, in more complex student issues, and at times where clarification of Sub School procedures and policies are required.
• Assistant Principals should be contacted in regard to concerns and complaints relating to staff members and more complex student issues.
• The Principal should be contacted for matters that pertain to college policy, college management, staff members or very complex student issues.

For contact details of any staff, or if unsure of who to contact, parents should call the office on 9579 2322

If a parent with a concern or complaint is not satisfied with the outcome determined by the College, they can contact the Eastern Metropolitan Regional Office. If a complaint about any aspect of school operation is raised with the Central or Regional Office without first being raised at a school level, it will be referred back to the school for resolution.

ANONYMOUS COMPLAINTS
The school will investigate all complaints; however it recognises that its staff might not be able to fully investigate a complaint if it cannot effectively liaise with the complainant. The Principal shall determine the extent to which an anonymous complaint shall be investigated.

UNREASONABLE COMPLAINANT CONDUCT
Unreasonable complainant conduct is behaviour that

• is clearly outside the expectations of confidentiality, cooperation, courtesy and respect
• calls for staff resources and time unjustified by the nature or significance of the complaint
• is vexatious i.e. without merit, often to cause annoyance
• is oriented towards conflict
When this occurs, the Principal can determine to have the investigation halted and develop a plan to address the complaint and the complainants’ interaction with the Department and inform the complainant of the plan.

When a complainant uses threatening or violent behaviour, all staff should follow the Occupational Violence Policy from the Department’s Human Resources website. The DEECD information brochure, ‘Parent Complaints – Information’, and the South Oakleigh College Policy ‘Addressing Parents’ Concerns and Complaints’ will be readily communicated to the College community via the school newsletter. The policy will be placed on the school website

This policy was approved by South Oakleigh College School council on Oct 2010