

Raising a concern

If you have a concern about something at the school, it is best to address the issue as soon as possible.

A good parent-school partnership will allow you to feel comfortable with addressing issues as they arise.

Sometimes people avoid raising issues that they think might cause conflict but this can lead to increased anxiety. Don't always expect conflict. Others may agree with you. Creative solutions can often be found when everyone works together and contributes their knowledge and insight. This works best when there is good communication and a positive attitude from everyone involved.

Your concerns should be addressed in a way that respects your child and family's privacy and confidentiality.

Get all the facts

The first step is to get all the facts. Writing these down can help clarify what the issue is. Once you have all the facts, you can then identify whether your concern is about a particular issue or incident, an aspect of your child's program, staff or personnel, or a combination of these.

Speak to the school first

Schools value concerns being raised early so that they have an opportunity to address the issue and stop it from getting worse. Think about what you will say and how you will say it. Focus on the outcome you want for your child.



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- Concerns about an issue or incident at school are best addressed by speaking to the teacher in the first instance.
- Concerns about your child's program are best addressed by the Student Support Group.
- Concerns about staff or personnel should be directed to the principal.

You may need to use one or all of these approaches. The principal and Student Support Group should be informed of all serious or ongoing issues. Keep in mind that it can take time to organise a Student Support Group meeting. It can be useful to keep your own record of all discussions and to ask the Student Support Group to note any decisions in the minutes.

Moving towards positive change

When discussing your concern with the teacher, try to be realistic about what, when and how changes can be made. Agree on a timeframe to trial the changes and then review what worked well and what could be improved.

Organise an appropriate time and place for the discussion. For example, ask the teacher at the start of the day if they are available to meet later in the day. Try to avoid having the discussion in places such as busy corridors. If a teacher or principal insists on continuing a discussion in the corridor, ask to move the discussion to a more private place.

If the situation continues, request a Student Support Group meeting to look at other ways to resolve the issue.

Put your concerns in writing

It's always a good idea to put serious concerns in writing to the principal. It's important to be clear about what you know about the situation without jumping to conclusions or making accusations.

Let the principal know that you would like to work through the issue together and ask for a response within a reasonable timeframe. Your letter also becomes part of your record keeping, which may be important if the matter is complex and takes some time to sort out.

Policies and guidelines

Once your concern has been raised, a process for dealing with it should be put in place. Find out if there are any policies or guidelines for addressing your concern. Ask the school for a copy of their complaints policy.

Information for parents about how to raise a concern or make a complaint is available on the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) website www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/parentcomplaint.htm

Find out if there are any policies or guidelines for addressing your concern.

Taking the matter further

If you are not satisfied with an outcome you can approach the Community Liaison Officer at the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Regional Office.

If the matter remains unresolved, you can address your complaint in writing to the Deputy Secretary, Office of School Education, c/o Manager, Community and Stakeholder Relations Branch, 33 St Andrews Place, East Melbourne VIC 3000.

You may also be able to submit your complaint for consideration by an independent agency such as the Victorian Ombudsman or the Victorian Human Rights Commission.

Suspensions and expulsions

Schools have an obligation to students and staff to provide a safe environment. Expected standards of behaviour are outlined in Student Engagement Policy Guidelines. The guidelines exist to ensure that everyone in the school community is treated with dignity and respect.

Serious breaches of the guidelines may result in disciplinary actions. Processes for suspensions and expulsions outlined in the guidelines include consulting with parents and supporting students to resolve the issue. Schools have an obligation to reflect on, and plan for, your child's return to school.

Information about the Student Engagement Policy Guidelines is available on the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) website www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/wellbeing/engagement/default.htm

Disability Standards for Education

Under Section 32 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, education providers must comply with the Disability Standards for Education. To comply, an education provider must make 'reasonable adjustments' to accommodate a student with a disability.

An adjustment is a measure or action taken to assist a student with a disability to participate in education and training on the same basis as other students. An adjustment is reasonable if it does this while taking into account the student's learning needs and balancing the interests of all parties affected, including those of the student with the disability, the education provider, staff and other students.

The Disability Standards for Education 2005 set benchmarks for education and training providers with which all Victorian government schools must comply. These include the right to comparable access, services and facilities, and the right to participate in education and training unimpeded by discrimination, including on the basis of stereotyped beliefs about the abilities and choices of students with disabilities.

The standards cover enrolment, participation, curriculum development, student support services, and the elimination of harassment and victimisation.

More information about the standards is available from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations website www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/programmes_funding/forms_guidelines/disability_standards_for_education.htm

Legal advice

For information and advice about issues of discrimination, contact an organisation that specialises in providing legal advice on disability issues (see page 28).

Tips for raising a concern

- Get all the facts.
- Be clear about the outcome you are seeking.
- Concerns about an issue or incident at school are best addressed by speaking to the teacher in the first instance.
- Concerns about your child's program are best addressed by the Student Support Group.
- Concerns about your child's program should be directed to the Student Support Group.
- Concerns about staff or personnel should be directed to the principal.
- Find out if there are any policies or guidelines for addressing your concern.
- Ask the school for a copy of their complaints policy.
- Organise an appropriate time and place for any discussion.
- Put serious concerns in writing to the principal.
- Focus on moving towards positive change.
- Make sure any changes are reviewed and adjusted if needed.
- If there is no positive change, contact (DEECD) and/or an independent agency.
- Information for parents about how to raise a concern is available on the DEECD website www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/parentcomplaint.htm