



Cann River P-12 College Parent Complaints Policy & Procedure

Purpose of this policy

To ensure Cann River P-12 College responds to parent concerns and complaints in an effective and timely manner.

All schools handle parent complaints on a range of matters. Parent complaints are best addressed in an environment where parents feel able to speak up about issues concerning the education and welfare of their children. This is reflected in open, two-way communication within the school, clear roles and responsibilities for all members of the school community, realistic expectations about what can be achieved by the school and an effective, published complaints handling procedure.

Complaints are an important way for the community to provide information and feedback to a school.

Complaints — as well as praise — provide valuable feedback about how well the school is meeting parent needs. The complainant is inviting the school to enter into a problem-solving process to find a solution. Often, if the complainant's emotional investment is high, the complaint can come across as a demand.

School responsibilities

It is the responsibility of the school to respond to and address written (letter and email) and verbal (face-to-face and phone) complaints raised by parents from their school community.

The initial receiver of the complaint must inform the complainant of the follows details:

- who to contact when making a complaint
- a description of the actions the school could take once a complaint is received
- a time frame for acknowledging written complaints and an expected time frame for complaint resolution
- the types of outcomes that the parent could expect
- information about what the school will do if the complaint is not able to be resolved by the school and the options the parent has to take their complaint further

Schools are required to:

- consider all parent complaints by:
 - raising the issues in the complaint with relevant staff and/or members of the school community
 - consulting, where appropriate, with relevant sections of the Department and/or external agencies for technical or other advice
 - discussing the school's findings with the parent in an attempt to reach an agreed resolution
 - considering the engagement of a mediator where a complaint has the potential to become intractable
- publicise the school's complaint-handling procedures within the school community and make them readily available
- review the school's complaint-handling procedures regularly
- ensure that complaints received are recorded and actions taken to resolve the complaint are well documented
- ensure a school record of all complaints, both written and verbal, is maintained at the school
- seek advice from either the central office or region about the management of complaints, including complex or challenging complaints or complainants and the use of mediation/conciliation services, and seek specialist or technical advice from external agencies and/or the Department when required.
- ensure all school personnel are aware of the school's parent complaint-handling procedures and provide opportunities for staff to attend training/professional development activities with a focus on complaint management.

- actively assist parents with the complaint process, informing them that at any point of the complaint process they are able to be supported by an advocate/support person. The role of the advocate/support person in this process is a supportive and enabling one. A complainant's advocate/support person may be a member of the family, a friend, a community member or a person provided through an appropriate support/advocate agency. The advocate/support person in the parent complaint process does not receive a fee for service. The complainant should inform the principal if they want to include an advocate/support person in the complaint process and provide the name of the advocate, contact details and the relationship to the complainant. An advocate/support person's role may include:
 - assistance for the complainant to clarify the issues in the complaint
 - discussion of difficulties being experienced by the complainant
 - assistance in the development of a co-operative and collaborative working relationship between the complainant and the school community
 - assistance for the complainant to understand Department policy and guidelines and the resolution being proposed for the complaint.

Make the first contact count

The complainant's first contact with the school can be the most important. They will be more satisfied if their concerns are dealt with by the first person they talk to, without having to re-explain their situation over and over.

On the first contact:

- listen to the complainant carefully and with an open mind
- treat them with respect and courtesy, take them seriously and let them have their say
- make it clear that the complaint will be taken seriously
- explain the procedures for resolving complaints
- state what you can do, not what you cannot do
- find out the nature of the complaint
- take notes
- if the complaint involves complex issues which are difficult for you to understand on first hearing, ask the complainant to put the complaint in writing
- make a mutually convenient time to meet, if a meeting is required.

Summarise the first contact with the complainant. For example:

Thank you for the information. We have agreed that both you and the principal can meet on (the agreed date). Let me check that I've got the key issues you'd like to discuss. With your permission, I'll write them down so that you don't need to explain your position again.

The great majority of complaints are by nature concerned enquiry with no hostility intended. However, you should be prepared for the occasional instance of aggression.

Discuss the complaint with the complainant

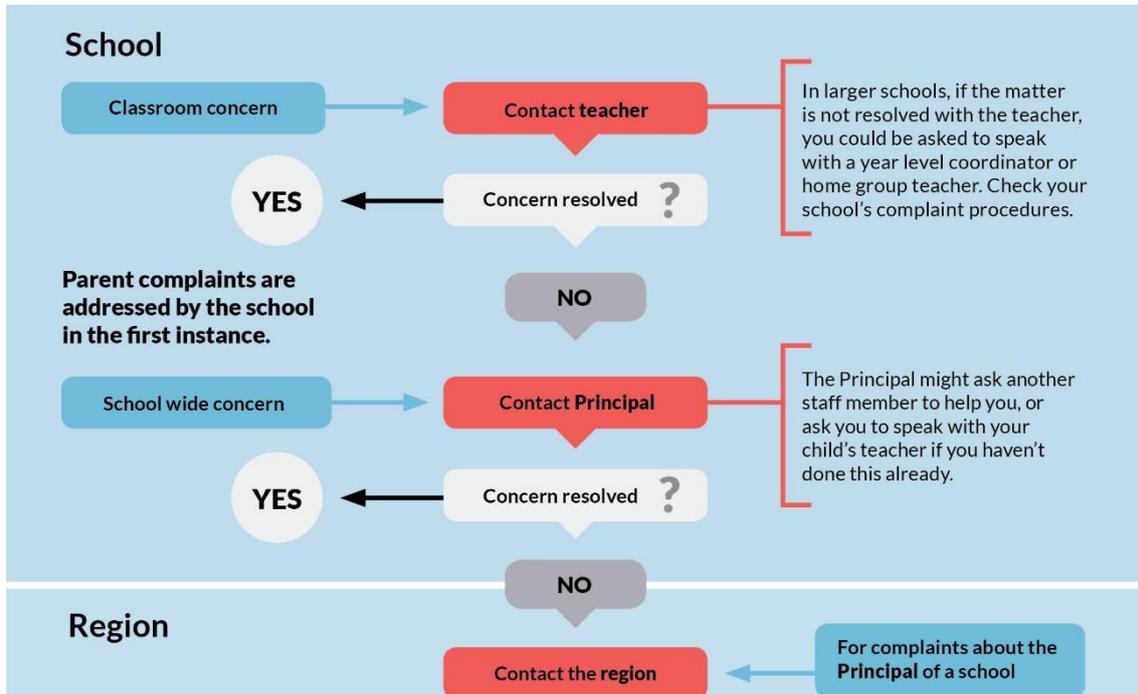
When it comes to discussing the substance of the complaint with the complainant:

- give the complainant your name and refer to them by name
- let the complainant decide whether the matter is really an enquiry, a concern or a complaint
- keep the discussion to relevant issues
- check the facts to make sure they are clear and beyond doubt
- check any assumptions you might have made by asking questions
- don't form an opinion before hearing all sides of the story.

Work through a problem-solving process to arrive at mutually acceptable solutions based on meeting the needs of all parties. Be clear about what solutions you can actually offer. Sometimes an outcome might be non-negotiable.

Explain what will happen next and what steps and support are available.

Parent Complaint Flowchart



Follow-up

The complainant with a particularly complex complaint should be followed up. It is important to keep lines of communication open after the initial discussion. Discuss how actions that have been mutually agreed will be followed up by both parties, and how any changes will be maintained. Discussion needs to focus on learning rather than attributing blame.

Make sure written responses address all of the issues, contain correct information and use plain language.

Keep everyone who is involved informed of the progress and outcome of the complaint.

Follow the requirements of your school's procedure to fully record the details of concerns and complaints.

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Approval Authority (Signature & Date)	
Date Reviewed	
Responsible for Review	Principal
Review Date	