



# Concerns & Complaints Policy

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**Purpose:**

To enable the School to provide a consistent and equitable response to concerns or complaints and to meet the requirements of the Child Safe Standards in Ministerial Order 1359 and the VRQA Minimum Standards for School Registration.

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**Scope:**

Staff, Students, Parents / Carers / Guardians of students enrolled at VHS and other School Community Members or members of the public

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**Implemented by:**

Mentors, Principal, Chairperson

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**Approved by:**

VHS Board

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**Reviewed:**

Every three years or as regulatory changes arise or improvements are identified

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**Communicated via:**

VHS website, Staff Handbook, Parent Handbook, Policies and Procedures Manual, Enrolment Agreement, student presentation

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## Overview

Village High School is a democratic school with a belief in all members of the community having a voice and that good relationships are essential for an effective school community. When dealing with enquiries, or concerns or complaints, a focus is on connection, empathy and restorative practices whilst allowing for voices to be heard and to ensure procedural fairness.

Effective participation in a community takes practice, trust, a willingness to receive feedback and a balance between the needs of the individual and the needs of the group.

VHS understands that from time-to-time students, parents/carers/guardians, community members, and members of the general public may wish to seek clarifying information, be dissatisfied with an outcome of an enquiry, or request or may have a more serious concern or complaint.

This policy outlines a process for each of those categories and nominates the most appropriate pathway for the situation.

Staff who wish to raise grievances with the school are to follow the Staff Grievances Procedure, the Staff Bullying, Sexual Harassment and Equal Opportunity Policy, and/or the Whistleblower Policy. If the school



or a staff member have a complaint about a community member's behavior, and it is a breach of the Parent Code of Conduct, the process outlined in the Enrolment Agreement will be followed.

There may be times when an enquiry, concern or complaint relates to Child Safety. In this situation, if the School considers the matter is of high level, the response will be guided by the Protecting Children Policy. If the matter does not raise concerns of unreported abuse or the risk of abuse at the School, it will be handled in the same way as other enquiries, concerns or complaints outlined below.

Whilst dealing with Enquiries, Concerns or Complaints, the School will:

- prioritise student wellbeing and educational needs throughout the management of any concern or complaint
- record all concerns and complaints within the School's complaints register which will be reviewed by the Board annually
- adhere to all school policies and processes, as well as taking instruction from external agencies during an investigation
- create and promote an environment where raising enquiries, concerns and complaints is actively encouraged
- have the ultimate goal of resolving any concerns and complaints quickly and where possible without formal mediation or external agencies
- ensure that all those involved in an issue have a reasonable opportunity to have their voice heard, defend themselves and/or explain their understanding of the context and any extenuating circumstances
- ensure that all responses and outcomes are fair, unbiased, consistent, and proportionate

## Definitions

Some definitions and examples of an enquiry, concern and complaint are provided below.

### Enquiry

An enquiry is when an individual would like additional information, clarification, or is seeking a position from the school on a topic or situation.

- Classroom or program-based queries
- Social, friendship or day to day school matters
- School fees, school policies
- Any items in the below Concerns and Complaints list that you may need additional information on to answer your query.

### Concern

A concern is an expression of worry or concern over the welfare or happiness of an individual, group or entity and is seeking action for their best interests.

- Incidents, situations, or general concerns regarding a student or individual within the school community
- Situations, incidents, or concerns relating to the operation of the school



## Complaint

A complaint may be defined as an expression of dissatisfaction about an identifiable situation, or the specific actions or lack of action of the school in relation to a situation for which the school is responsible.

- A breach of a school policy, agreement, or code of conduct
- The handling of an incident, situation, or circumstance by the School
- The outcome of a decision made by the School, including matters relating to procedural fairness

## Making an Enquiry or Raising a Concern or Complaint

### For students

Students have a number of avenues for Enquiries, Concerns, and Complaints.

For enquiries, students are encouraged to ask questions of Mentors or staff members to help them understand or clarify the facts or circumstances of the matter. Some matters may be suitable to be raised at Morning Meeting or Student Parliament. Students are also encouraged to speak with a trusted adult or family member.

The trusted adult or family member can make an Enquiry or Raise a Concern or Complaint on behalf of the student, if requested by the student to do so or deemed necessary by the adult. Where suitable the student will be involved in the process until an outcome is achieved.

At times, a student may not be able to identify if their issue is an Enquiry, a Concern or a Complaint. Irrespective of the way a student raises their issue, the School will ensure the appropriate process is followed.

Students are presented information on these avenues and this policy in a child friendly and age-appropriate way as part of their class program, on an annual basis. This program delivery takes into account the diverse needs of students and families.

### For Adults

Identify if it is an Enquiry, Concern or Complaint. Any matters relating to Child Safety should be treated as a Concern, and raised in an urgent manner, maintaining privacy throughout the process. If the school believes that a matter raised via the Concerns or Complaints process is actually an enquiry, the complainant will be advised of such and redirected to the enquiry process.

For Enquiries, follow these steps:

- Contact the relevant person as per the table below outlining your question or the information that is requested either via email ([admin@pivillageschool.org.au](mailto:admin@pivillageschool.org.au)), phone (03 59 568 568) or in person (see table below for contacts and suitable times),
- Once a response is provided, the questioner will determine if the Enquiry has been resolved. If so, no further action is required.
- If the questioner is not satisfied but feels further information or clarity has the potential to resolve the Enquiry then an additional response should be requested via email, phone or in person.



- Once a subsequent response is provided, the questioner will determine if the Enquiry has been resolved. If so, no further action is required. This process can be repeated until there is resolution.
- If the questioner determines that no further information or clarification can resolve the Enquiry the Enquiry becomes either a Concern or a Complaint and the following process should be followed.

For a Concern or Complaint:

- Identify the preferred method of contact - email, phone or in-person.

For email, the complainant should email the appropriate person from the 'who to contact' table below. If it is unclear as to who would best receive a direct email you can email [admin@villagehighschool.org](mailto:admin@villagehighschool.org) and it will be forwarded the appropriate staff member. In your email, please make it clear that it is a Concern or Complaint.

For phone, the complainant should call the school on 5678 7424 and request a call back from the appropriate person from the 'who to contact' table below within a specified timeframe and advise that it is regarding a Concern or Complaint.

For in-person, the complainant should request a meeting with the appropriate person from the 'who to contact' table below within a specified timeframe, via email ([admin@villagehighschool.org](mailto:admin@villagehighschool.org)) or phone (5678 7424), advising it is regarding Concern or Complaint.

<u>About What / Issue</u>	<u>Who to Contact</u>	<u>How</u>
Classroom activities, social issues, Out 'n' Abouts / Camps	The relevant Mentor	By email, phone, or in person. <i>Mentors have limited time available in person during drop-off and pick up periods so please book a mutually agreeable time in advance.</i> <i>Appointments with Mentors are available between 3.30pm-5pm, Monday-Friday</i>
School Curriculum	Student's Mentor or Principal	<i>By email, phone or in person</i> <i>Appointments are available between 3.30pm-5pm, Monday-Friday</i>
Complex student issues including Student Welfare (including Child Safety matters), Child Safety reports, Staff Members, Code of Conduct breaches	Principal	<i>By email, phone or in person</i> <i>Appointments for in-person meetings are available between 8am-5pm, Monday-Friday</i> <i>Appointments should be made for in-person contact to ensure there is sufficient time and a quiet location available to discuss the matter</i>



<u>About What / Issue</u>	<u>Who to Contact</u>	<u>How</u>
School Policy, School Management, Fees, Enrolment & General matters, Procedural Fairness concerns	Principal	<i>By email, phone or in person Appointments for in person meetings are available between 8am-5pm, Monday-Friday</i>
Parent/Guardian or School Community member behaviour, breaches to Parent Code of Conduct	Principal	<i>By email, phone or in person Appointments for in person meetings are available between 8am-5pm, Monday-Friday</i>

During the process, School community members are asked to:

- Approach the situation with a positive mindset and intention to resolve the matter
- Raise the concern or complaint as soon as possible using the above table and definitions for guidance
- Provide detailed information, which may be requested in writing
- Maintain and respect everyone’s privacy and confidentiality
- Be calm, courteous, honest and sincere

School community members are also asked to:

- Recognise everyone has rights and responsibilities that must be balanced
- Respect and understand each other’s point of view; value difference rather than judge and blame
- Realise we need to achieve an outcome acceptable to the group

## Responding to Concerns and Complaints

The School’s response will be prompt, courteous, and in line with procedural fairness. All matters will be dealt with in-line with School Policies and procedures.

The following will be followed in response to a concern or complaint:

- The concern or complaint will be acknowledged either in person, by telephone, or in writing
- The appropriate staff member will look into the concern or complaint and provide a response as soon as possible
- All formal discussions and actions will be documented
- The complainant’s wellbeing will be considered, and they will be offered support and protection throughout the process
- Steps to identify and avoid victimisation will be taken

## Roles and Responsibilities

Depending on the nature of the Concern or Complaint, the following responsibilities exist:



**Mentors** will investigate and address enquiries, concerns and complaints relating to minor day-to-day incidents and concerns with student learning specific to that Mentor.

The **Principal** will address concerns and complaints related to the overall school curriculum, or where concerns brought to the attention of a Mentor are not considered to have been dealt with appropriately.

The **Principal** is responsible for investigating and addressing concerns and complaints relating to more complex matters, such as student welfare, child safety reports, students who have requested a review on a previous decision or school rule, staff members, and staff or parent code of conduct breaches, school policy, school management, fees, enrolment and general matters.

The **Principal**, upon receipt, can reject a complaint that in their opinion is vexatious, without substance, or does not warrant further action taking into account the provisions of this policy. In some instances, the complaint may be redirected to the Enquiry process.

**The Chairperson** will be responsible for addressing a concern or complaint that involves the Principal, or where there is an inability to resolve a concern or complaint. If those concerned are present at the Board meeting, they shall be asked to declare a conflict of interest and remove themselves from discussion on the matter.

All staff involved in handling concerns and complaints will take appropriate measures to ensure each matter is dealt with discreetly, and that confidentiality and privacy of information is maintained in accordance with legislative and policy requirements.

### Outcomes

The school will work with the relevant individual/s to find an appropriate outcome which might include:

- An explanation or further information that resolves the concern or complaint
- Mediation, counselling or other support
- An apology, expression of regret or admission of fault
- Review of a decision, including the potential for the original decision to be altered
- Review of policies, procedures or practices
- Making a report or referral to DHHS or other external agency or support service

### Timeframes

Timeframes for dealing with concerns and complaints will vary depending on the complexity of the matter. However, the school will take all reasonable efforts to ensure that they are addressed;

- As promptly and efficiently as practicable
- Within a timeframe that is agreeable to the parties involved
- In a manner that supports due process and the principles of natural justice

### If a Concern or Complaint is not Resolved

- If a concern or complaint raised with a Mentor is not satisfactorily resolved it will be referred to the Principal.



- Any concern or complaint that involves the Principal will be referred to the Chairperson of the Board.
- Any matter that remains unresolved after being dealt with by the Principal will be referred to the School Board. The School Board will then investigate the matter and determine an appropriate outcome. If the complaint refers to an action of any person who is also a Board member or in attendance at the board meeting, that person shall be required to be absent from Board discussions and deliberations of the matter.
- If the matter remains unresolved after being responded to by the Board, and relates to the minimum standards for schools, the Board will provide information for the individual to lodge an appeal with the relevant authority; the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority.

## Related Resources

*VRQA Minimum Standards for School Registration*

*Concerns & Complaints Pathway*

## Related Policies

*Behaviour Management Policy*

*Staff Bullying, Sexual Harassment & Equal Opportunity Policy*

*Bullying & Harassment Policy*

*Protecting Children Policy*

*Staff Code of Conduct*

*Parent Code of Conduct*

*Student Code of Conduct*

*Enrolment Policy*

*School Fees Policy*

*Enrolment Agreement*