



Complaints and Grievances

Statement of Context

Yarra Valley Grammar is open to receiving or hearing the concerns of parents, students, visitors and the wider School community. Any complaint or grievance will be received in a positive manner and will be taken seriously. Yarra Valley Grammar is committed to improving the services it provides and to protecting the wellbeing of its employees, students, volunteers and the wider School community. All decisions related to a complaint or grievance will be made with consideration given to the ramifications for the individual as well as for the School.

Complaints and grievances may be heard informally or formally, and verbally or in writing. Formal avenues for handling of complaints and grievances will be fully documented. Complainants will be treated with equality and respect and without intimidation should they choose to follow the Complaints and Grievance process.

A Complaints and Grievances form is available on the School's website at www.yvg.vic.edu.au

Any complaint or grievance received formally in writing will be acknowledged within two working days.

Note the following complaints or grievances not covered by this policy:

- a complaint or grievance regarding bullying or violence will be handled as outlined in the School's Bullying, Violence, Harassment and Discrimination Policy
- matters to do with physical, sexual or emotional abuse will be handled as outlined in the School's Child Protection Policy
- Overseas Students should refer to the School's Overseas-Student Complaints and Appeals (Grievance Policy) or for further specific details or additional support available under the Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000 (ESOS Act)

Reference Points / Background Papers

YVG Complaints and Grievances Form, at www.yvg.vic.edu.au (refer Policies and Procedures)

YVG Bullying, Violence, Harassment and Discrimination Policy

YVG Child Protection Policy

YVG Privacy Policy

Independent Schools Victoria (ISV) www.is.vic.edu.au

Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) www.vrqa.vic.gov.au

Definitions:

For the purposes of this policy, the following definitions apply:

Complaint: a statement that something is unsatisfactory or unacceptable

Grievance: a feeling of resentment over something believed to be wrong or unfair, giving cause for complaint

Complainant: refers to the individual making the complaint or grievance

Respondent: refers to the individual against whom a complaint or allegation is made.

Investigator: refers to an independent person who may be asked to investigate allegations or details of a complaint or grievance, without personal interest or bias.

Privacy

The School respects the privacy of individuals and will protect personal information provided by a complainant in the complaints and grievances process. Paper documentation will be kept in locked storage and digital records will be password protected. While investigating a complaint or grievance, the School will only collect information that is required for investigation and will not share information without permission from the complainant. For further information, refer to the School's Privacy Policy, available at www.yvg.vic.edu.au.

Aim

To provide a process for parents, students and members of the School community to follow in the event that they have a complaint or grievance with the School.

Policy details

If the source of complaint or grievance is a parent:

Parents are encouraged to make their own decision about the appropriate member of staff in the School to whom their complaint or grievance should be made, however, some guidance is as follows:

- If a complaint or grievance to a classroom teacher is of a minor nature and easily resolved then the parent and teacher should act together to resolve the issue between them
- If the complaint or grievance is of a more substantial nature then the classroom teacher should refer the complainant to a more senior member of staff in the appropriate area (e.g. Head of Department, Year Level Coordinator, Head of Student Wellbeing, School Chaplain, relevant Head of School)
- If the complaint or grievance is of a substantial nature and it cannot be resolved at any of these previous levels then it should be referred to the Principal
- The Principal or senior member of staff may choose to interview students without parents or staff members under investigation being present, but with another impartial staff member present at all times
- The School's representative will record the details of the complaint or grievance, the steps taken and time frame involved to resolve the matter
- Failing resolution by the Principal, the parent may request that the matter be referred to the Board Chair who is the final authority on matters concerning the School.

If the source of complaint or grievance is a student:

Students are encouraged to make their own decision about the appropriate member of staff in the School to whom their complaint or grievance should be made, however, some guidance is as follows:

- The teacher and the student should act to resolve a minor complaint or grievance to the satisfaction of both parties. If the student feels that they cannot raise the matter directly with the staff member concerned, if a satisfactory resolution is not achieved, or if the matter is of a substantial nature, the student may approach their Class Tutor, Year Level Coordinator, Head of Student Wellbeing, School Chaplain or relevant Head of School
- Failing a resolution at the senior staff level, the matter should be referred to the Principal
- The School's representative will record the details of the complaint or grievance, the steps taken and timeframe involved to resolve the matter.

If the source of complaint or grievance is a member of the general School Community:

- Members of the general School Community are encouraged to make their own decision about the appropriate member of staff in the School to whom their complaint or grievance should be made, however, some guidance is as follows:
- If a complaint or grievance is of a minor nature, it should be directed to the Corporate Services Manager
- If the complaint or grievance is of a more substantial nature then it should be directed to the Principal. Failing resolution, the parent may request that the matter be referred to the Board Chair who is the final authority on matters concerning the School
- The School's representative will record the details of the complaint or grievance, the steps taken and time frame involved to resolve the matter.

If in any of the cases outlined above, a successful resolution is not achieved, or where the parent, student or member of the community remains dissatisfied and would like access to a mediator, external counsellor or other independent regulatory body, the School will provide assistance with contact details for referral.

Meeting Procedures for dealing with a Complaint or Grievance

The following steps will be followed by the School's representative:

Acknowledgement of the Complaint or Grievance

- A verbal complaint or grievance will be acknowledged and recorded by the School's representative at the time of communication of the complaint or grievance
- A written complaint or grievance will be acknowledged in writing by the School's representative within two working days.

Receiving the Complaint or Grievance:

- The role of each person at the meeting or investigation will be established
- The complainant will be listened to and supported and their concerns will be acted upon at the earliest opportunity
- Agree on a timeline for investigating and resolving the complaint or grievance
- The complainant may choose to withdraw the complaint or grievance at any time.

Investigating or Assessing the Complaint or Grievance:

- The process to be followed will be outlined, taking into account **Considerations in Dealing with an Investigation** (detailed below)
 - The parties will be informed that any information obtained in the meeting or investigation will be confidential
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- A chronology of events (who, what, why, when, how, etc) will be established with the complainant
- Any applicable School policies or procedures will be identified for the complainant
- The respondent will be given the right of response
- An independent investigator may be appointed if required.

Resolving the Complaint or Grievance:

- The complainant will be asked for the outcome they are hoping for (best case scenario) and the next steps will be discussed, providing a reasonable and agreed time frame of when to report back or meet again
- It will be explained that the complainant cannot be adversely affected because they have made a complaint or grievance and they will be notified about who to report matters to internally if they feel that they are being adversely affected
- Time will be provided for the complainant to ask questions
- Detailed notes will be taken of the conversation (including dates, people involved), including any supporting documentation.

Providing an Outcome:

- The complainant will be provided with a written summary of the meeting and clarification of the next steps to be taken, within a set time frame.
- Should the matter remain unresolved then either the complainant or the School may refer the matter to a higher authority, as outlined in this policy.

The meeting should be conducive to maintaining positive relationships and the School's representative should ensure that there is a fair, objective analysis of the situation.

If the matter is not resolved:

If the complainant wishes to pursue an unresolved matter, the issue should be referred to the Principal. The Principal reserves discretion as to making a final decision as to how the complaint or grievance will be resolved. In the event that the complaint or grievance involves the Principal, the Board Chair will be given absolute discretion as to how the matter will be resolved. The complainant also has the right to seek further resolution through relevant independent authorities, such as Independent Schools Victoria (ISV) or the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA).

Considerations in dealing with an Investigation

Procedural fairness and transparency should be maintained at all times to:

- Protect the rights, interests and expectations of the participants in the investigation
- Enhance the credibility of the investigation process
- Rely on the investigation when making decisions
- Defend decisions in a court or tribunal.

The investigator should ensure that:

- The respondent is aware of all the allegations made against them in sufficient detail
- The respondent is allowed a reasonable opportunity and adequate time to respond to each of the allegations
- An investigation is carried out in a reasonable timeframe
- The investigator is independent and has no personal interest or bias in the matter being investigated
- Participants are given the opportunity to have a support person in the interviews pertaining to the investigation
- Participants are required to maintain confidentiality and sign a confidentiality agreement
- Participants are given the opportunity to respond to any contradictory evidence
- The investigator makes reasonable and diligent enquiries to ensure that there is sufficient evidence before making findings

Impartiality

The investigator must be impartial and not have a vested interest in the outcome of the investigation. Any potential conflicts of interest should be disclosed.
