COMPLAINTS POLICY

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to:

* provide an outline of the complaints process at Saltwater P-9 College so that parents and members of the community are informed of how they can raise complaints or concerns about issues arising at our school
* ensure that all complaints regarding Saltwater P-9 College are managed in a timely, effective, fair and respectful manner.

## **Scope**

## This policy relates to complaints brought by students, parents, carers, or members of our school community and applies to all matters relating to our school.

## In some limited instances, we may need to refer a complainant to another policy or area if there are different processes in place to the manage the issue including:

* Complaints and concerns relating to fraud and corruption will be managed in accordance with the department’s [Fraud and Corruption Policy](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/report-fraud-or-corruption/overview)
* Criminal matters will be referred to Victorian Police
* Legal claims will be referred to the Department’s Legal Division
* Complaints and concerns relating to child abuse will be managed in accordance with our Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations Policy and Procedures <https://saltwatercollege.vic.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Child-Safe-Reporting-Policy-Saltwater-P-9-College.pdf>

## **Policy**

Saltwater P-9 College welcomes feedback, both positive and negative, and is committed to continuous improvement. We value open communication with our families and are committed to understanding complaints and addressing them appropriately. We recognise that the complaints process provides an important opportunity for reflection and learning.

We value and encourage open and positive relationships with our school community. We understand that it is in the best interests of students for there to be a trusting relationship between families and our school.

You can also ask your parent, carer or another trusted adult outside of the school, to talk to us about the issue instead. Information about our parent/carer complaints and concerns process is outlined further below. The parent/carer process also applies to students who are mature minors, refer to: [Mature Minors and Decision Making](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/mature-minors-and-decision-making/policy)

Other ways you can raise a concern or complaint with us include:

* talking to a member of the student representative council about your concern and any suggestions you have for resolving it
* participating in our Attitudes to School Survey (for Grades 4-6)
* participating in our student forums held every term
* writing a note for our anonymous student suggestions box at the wellbeing office
* raise and discuss issues in a courteous and respectful manner
* acknowledge that the goal is to achieve an outcome that is in the affected student’s best interests and acceptable to all parties
* act in good faith and respect the privacy and confidentiality of those involved, as appropriate
* recognise that all parties, including the broader school community, have rights and responsibilities that must be balanced
* recognise that schools and the Department may be subject to legal constraints on their ability to act or disclose information in some circumstances.

Further information and resources to support students to raise issues or concerns are available at:

* [Report Racism Hotline](https://www.vic.gov.au/report-racism-or-religious-discrimination-schools) (call 1800 722 476) – this hotline enables students to report concerns relating to racism or religious discrimination
* [Reach Out](https://au.reachout.com/?gclid=CjwKCAiAgbiQBhAHEiwAuQ6BktaB5xneGFK3TnOql5c5eZ7af7dDm9ffLZa7N59FEtbtQzVIk8sGWhoC8N0QAvD_BwE)
* [Headspace](https://headspace.org.au/)
* [Kids Helpline](https://kidshelpline.com.au/?gclid=CjwKCAiAgbiQBhAHEiwAuQ6Bkro6UD2EBcRILznFnRhKjfi5I84jJlUa0fyiiYLQ4mHx5sXTStxH8BoCCEIQAvD_BwE) (call 1800 55 1800)
* [Victorian Aboriginal Education Association](https://www.vaeai.org.au/) (VAEAI)

## **Complaints and concerns process for parents, carers and community members**

**Preparation for raising a concern or complaint**

Saltwater P-9 College encourages parents, carers or members of the community who may wish to submit a complaint to:

* carefully consider the issues you would like to discuss
* remember you may not have all the facts relating to the issues that you want to raise
* think about how the matter could be resolved
* be informed by checking the policies and guidelines set by the Department and Saltwater P-9 College.

Saltwater P-9 College is always happy to discuss with parents/carers and community members any concerns that they may have. Concerns in the first instance should be directed to your child’s teacher. Where possible, school staff will work with you to ensure that your concerns are appropriately addressed.

Where concerns cannot be resolved in this way, parents or community members may wish to make a formal complaint to the Principal or Assistant Principal, noting that formal complaints should be directed to a member of the school’s leadership team.

If you would like to make a formal complaint, in most cases, depending on the nature of the complaint raised, our school will first seek to understand the issues and will then convene a resolution meeting with the aim of resolving the complaint together. The following process will apply:

1. **Complaint received:** Please either email, telephone or arrange a meeting through the front office with the Assistant Principal or Principal, to outline your complaint so that we can fully understand what the issues are. We can discuss your complaint in a way that is convenient for you, whether in writing, in person or over the phone. The College will acknowledge the receipt of the complaint via a phone call to the complainant. All complaints and outcomes will be recorded and filed on our internal school server under a folder named: Complaints.
2. **Information gathering:** Depending on the issues raised in the complaint, the Principal, Assistant Principal or nominee may need to gather further information to properly understand the situation. This process may also involve speaking to others to obtain details about the situation or the concerns raised.
3. **Response:** Where possible, a resolution meeting will be arranged with the Assistant Principal/Principal to discuss the complaint with the objective of reaching a resolution satisfactory to all parties. If after the resolution meeting we are unable to resolve the complaint together, we will work with you to produce a written summary of the complaint in the event you would like to take further action about it. In some circumstances, the Principal may determine that a resolution meeting would not appropriate. In this situation, a response to the complaint will be provided in writing.
4. **Timelines:** Saltwater P-9 College will acknowledge receipt of your complaint as soon as possible (usually within 48 hours) and will seek to resolve complaints in a timely manner. Depending on the complexity of the complaint, Saltwater P-9 College may need some time to gather enough information to fully understand the circumstances of your complaint. We will endeavour to complete any necessary information gathering and hold a resolution meeting where appropriate within 10 working days of the complaint being raised. In situations where further time is required, Saltwater P-9 College will consult with you and discuss any interim solutions to the dispute that can be put in place.

**Resolution**

Where appropriate, Saltwater P-9 College may seek to resolve a complaint by:

* an apology or expression of regret
* a change of decision
* a change of policy, procedure or practice
* offering the opportunity for student counselling or other support
* other actions consistent with school values that are intended to support the student, parent and school relationship, engagement, and participation in the school community.

In some circumstances, Saltwater P-9 College may also ask you to attend a meeting with an independent third party, or participate in a mediation with an accredited mediator to assist in the resolution of the dispute. This would include assistance from the independent office for school dispute resolution.

**Escalation**

If a parent or community member is not satisfied that their complaint has been resolved by the school, or if their complaint is about the Principal, then the complaint should be referred to the South western Region by contacting: 8397 0310.

Saltwater P-9 College may also refer a complaint to South Western Region if we believe that we have done all we can to address the complaint.

**Record keeping and other requirements**

To meet Department and legal requirements, our school must keep written records of:

Serious, substantial or unusual complaints

Complaints relating to the Child Information Sharing Scheme and Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme, to meet regulatory requirements - refer to Child and Family Violence Information Sharing Schemes for further information

Our school also follows Department policy to ensure that record-keeping, reporting, privacy and employment law obligations are met when responding to complaints or concerns.

## **communication**

This policy will be communicated to our school community in the following ways:

* Available publicly on school website
* Included in staff induction processes
* Included in our staff handbook/manual
* Included in transition and enrolment packs
* Discussed at parent information nights/sessions
* Annual reference in school newsletter
* Discussed at student forums/through communication tools
* Hard copy available from school administration upon request

**FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES**

The Department’s Policy and Advisory Library (PAL):

* [Complaints - Parents](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/complaints/policy)

The Department’s parents’ website:

* [Raise a complaint or concern about your school](https://www.vic.gov.au/raise-complaint-or-concern-about-your-school)
* [Report racism or religious discrimination in schools](https://www.vic.gov.au/report-racism-or-religious-discrimination-schools)

**Review period**

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| Policy last reviewed | 30.05.2022 |
| Consultation | Jackie Daniali  School Council  Consultative Committee  Parent representative Group  Staff |
| Approved by | Principal |
| Next scheduled review date | 30.05.2024 |