



**Vermont Secondary College**  
*'Lift up thine eyes'*

# **College Policy: Raising and Addressing Community Concerns**

@ 21 October 2010

Vermont Secondary College is a diverse learning community consisting of approximately 1300 students from over 900 families, and over 140 teaching and Education Support staff. Our college promotes the achievement of excellence in a learning environment that is safe, caring and accepting of diversity. Our College is committed to the development of life-long learning skills that motivate and enable all students to achieve their individual goals and make a positive contribution to the global community

We have a cohesive, close-knit community that shares our vision, aims and values. We have a history of active parent involvement in the school and our parents have a strong sense of the school as a community; VSC values and actively encourages community input. Vermont Secondary College continues to enjoy an exceptionally high level of parent and community support; General Satisfaction with the College as measured by the Parent Opinion Survey in 2009 was 5.74. In 2008 we combined our 'Auxiliary' and 'Parents' and Citizens' Association' to form our new 'VSC Community Association'. There is strong parental support for the college's Sports program, with parents regularly attending and assisting with sporting events. Our music program enjoys the ongoing assistance of the Music Support Group. Our Past Students Association is growing and a small committee continues to meet regularly. Parents, including some whose children no longer attend the college, play key roles in the Human Powered Vehicle and Production teams.

The college Vision and our Values of Excellence, Integrity, Responsibility, Respect and Tolerance reflect our college ethos, and inform our approach to dealing with community concerns:

## **College Values:**

- Excellence – In the achievement of individual and team goals (Do your very best)
- Integrity - Of individuals in their words, actions and relationships (Do the right thing)
- Responsibility - For our words and action (Be in charge of yourself)
- Respect - For self, others and property (Consider others)
- Tolerance - Of diversity and individual differences (Understand and accept that people are different)

## **College Vision:**

- Valuing all students
- Academic excellence
- Excellence in all College programs
- Teachers committed to personal and professional growth
- Strong community focus
- Individualised facilities to cater for innovation

These procedures cover concerns about:

- general issues of student behaviour that are contrary to the school's code of conduct
- incidents of bullying or harassment in the classroom or the school yard
- learning programs, assessment and reporting of student learning
- communication with parents
- school fees and payments
- general administrative issues
- any other school-related matters except as detailed below.

These procedures do not cover matters for which there are existing rights of review or appeal, as detailed in the Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide. Those matters include:

- student discipline matters involving expulsions
- concerns about employee conduct or performance and issues that should be dealt with by performance management, grievance resolution or disciplinary action
- complaints by the Department's employees related to their employment
- student critical incident matters
- other criminal matters.

**Ownership and scope** The college has developed these procedures to address concerns in collaboration with parents and the college community, through consultation with the VSCCA, MSG and Education Committee, and Student Leader teams.

### **Expectations**

The school expects a community member raising a concern to:

- do so promptly, as soon as possible after the issue occurs
- provide complete and factual information about the concern
- maintain and respect the privacy and confidentiality of all parties
- acknowledge that a common goal is to achieve an outcome acceptable to all parties
- act in good faith, and in a calm and courteous manner
- show respect and understanding of each other's point of view and value difference, rather than judge and blame
- recognise that all parties have rights and responsibilities which must be balanced.

The school will address any concerns received from community members:

- courteously
- efficiently
- fairly
- promptly, or within the timeline agreed with the person with the concern
- in accordance with due process, principles of natural justice and the Department's regulatory framework.

### **Raising concerns**

**The college encourages students to approach their class teacher and/or Student Manager directly about any concerns they may have.**

**In line with the college's House structure, parents should raise issues with their child's Student Manager.**

The community member should telephone, email or write to the college. Concerns can be raised in person, but an appointment must be made. For contact details for any staff member, call the college General Office on 9873-1077, or check the college website for staff email addresses.

Concerns from parents should be addressed to:

- the Student Manager about learning issues and incidents that happened in their class or form;
- the Student Manager or Head of House if students from several classes are involved;
- the Assistant Principal about issues relating to school policy, school management, staff members or complex student issues.

The Assistant Principal may refer a matter to the college Principal where appropriate.

**If not sure who to contact, community members should address their concerns to Harry Ruff, the Assistant Principal responsible for Community Liaison, on 9873-1077 or [ruffh@vermontsc.vic.edu.au](mailto:ruffh@vermontsc.vic.edu.au).**

### **Help with raising concerns**

Personal support is most appropriate in situations where the community member and others involved in the process have emotional issues related to the concern being raised.

Complainants can seek the services of an advocate when they feel they are unable to express their concern clearly. An advocate can be a friend or someone who is available through an appropriate support organisation who does not receive a fee for service.

All parties involved in addressing a concern may seek the services of a mediator when there is difficulty coming to an agreement.

The school will ensure that the community member is aware of these supports. Those who wish to use these support services should ensure the person addressing the concern is aware of their intention and is in agreement.

### **Managing parent concerns information**

The school will record the following details of all concerns received, even if it appears to be minor:

- name and contact details (with permission) of the person with a concern
- the date the concern was expressed or made
- the form in which the concern was received (such as face-to-face, by telephone, in writing, by email)
- a brief description of the concern
- details of the school officer responding to the concern
- action taken on the concern
- the outcome of action taken on the concern

- any recommendations for future improvement in the school's policy or procedures.

However, in the first instance, when the concern is easily resolved in a telephone call, a brief note in the school's/principal's/teacher's diary recording the issue and the resolution may be all that is required.

**If community members refuse to identify themselves, college staff should still note the concern, but must point out that it may not be possible to follow through with appropriate action to remedy the concern.**

The school will make every effort to resolve concerns before involving other levels of the Department. The school will give a community member with a concern a copy of its concerns procedures.

The school will determine whether a concern should be managed through the school's concerns process or through other processes of the Department.

All concerns will be noted and acted on promptly by the staff member who receives it.

The school will acknowledge all concerns made in writing. It will provide the community member with a timeline for investigating the concern.

The school will make every attempt to resolve a concern as quickly as possible. If the concern involves many students and a range of issues, the school will need more time to investigate and resolve it.

Should the concern involve complex issues, the school might need to take advice from the Department's regional office, which may take more time. The school will tell the community member the new timeline for addressing the concern and the reasons for any delays. In all cases, the school will try to resolve a concern within 20 school days.

### **Remedies**

If a concern is substantiated in whole or part, the school will offer an appropriate remedy. For example, at its discretion and depending on the circumstances, the school might offer:

- an explanation or further information about the issue
- mediation, counselling or other support
- an apology, expression of regret or admission of fault
- to change its decision
- to change its policies, procedures or practices
- to cancel a debt (such as for school payments)
- a fee refund.

The school will implement the remedy as soon as practicable.

### **Referral of concerns**

If a person with a concern is not satisfied with the outcome determined by the school, they should contact the DEECD's Eastern Metropolitan Region office on 9265-2400.

The officer from the region will ask the community member for a complete and factual account in writing of the concern and their opinion about why the school did not resolve it to their satisfaction.

If the concern cannot be resolved by the community member, school and regional office working together, the regional office may refer it to the Department's Group Coordination Division. The Division will ask the community member for a complete and factual account in writing of the concern and the community member's opinion about why the school and regional office did not resolve it to their satisfaction and will ask the community member to outline their view on the course of action required to resolve the concern. Where the community member is unable to provide a written account the officer from Group Coordination Division should act on the information provided.

### **Communication and training**

The school will make information about procedures for addressing concerns readily available to parents and the school community, in clear and easy-to-understand language.

The information will include:

- how a person can raise a concern
- the person's responsibilities
- information to be provided by the person
- who the person should contact and their contact details
- the process and timeframes for managing concerns.

The school's procedures for addressing concerns will be:

- published on the school's website
- printed in a leaflet given to a parent when their child enrolls (enrolment and transition packs)
- referred to in the publicity brochure
- referred to in year level handbooks
- printed in the school newsletter
- publicised on a poster displayed in the main entry foyer of the school.

The school will:

- brief all members of staff (including volunteers) about its procedures to address concerns annually (distribute with WWCC applications and display at General Office).
- provide staff with (or provide access to) training and support appropriate to their responsibilities under the procedures
- ensure staff who manage concerns demonstrate the personal attributes outlined in the Good Practice Guide: Ombudsman Victoria's guide to complaint handling for *Victorian public sector agencies*.

### **Monitoring the Community Concerns policy**

Copies of the VSC Community Concern proforma will be stored with the Assistant Principal and in the General Office.

The school will review its information about concerns made over time to:

- identify common or recurring issues that may need addressing;
- assess the effectiveness of these and other procedures and whether they are being followed;
- use information provided to the school through the parent opinion survey on the views of parents.

The school will monitor community concerns, and consider issues raised through the community concerns process, and any other relevant information from the parent opinion survey, when undertaking a review of the school's policies, procedures and operations.

### **Review of policy: 2013**

The school council will regularly review its policy and procedures to effectively address parent/community concerns as part of its cyclic policy and procedures review schedule.

Name of person/position with ultimate responsibility for reviewing policy: Harry Ruff (Assistant Principal responsible for Community Liaison)

References:

[http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/commrel/contacts/POLICY\\_ONLY\\_Addressing\\_parents\\_concerns.pdf](http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/commrel/contacts/POLICY_ONLY_Addressing_parents_concerns.pdf)

[www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/www./html/93-complaint-handling-uide-for-the-victorian-public-sector.asp17](http://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/www./html/93-complaint-handling-uide-for-the-victorian-public-sector.asp17)

DEECD Parent Complaints – information brochure

Links:

VSC Student Engagement & Wellbeing Policy



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## **Community Concern proforma**

@ 21 October 2010

Date: .....

TO: Teacher / Student Manager / Head of House / Asst Prin. / Other .....

FROM: General Office / Other .....

CONCERNING: .....

(child / subject / staff member / other)

NAME: .....

*If community members refuse to identify themselves, college staff should still note the concern, but must point out that it may not be possible to follow through with appropriate action to remedy the concern.*

Contact details: .....

(address, phone/mobile, email)

Contact method: in person / phone call / email / letter / other

DETAILS OF CONCERN:

ACTION TO BE TAKEN / BY WHOM / BY WHEN:

(Refer to policy for appropriate process to follow.)

OUTCOME:

FURTHER ACTION REQUIRED:

REVIEW: