

Concerns & Complaints Policy

Purpose:

To enable the Learning Co-operative 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.

Scope:

School Coordinator (Principal), school staff (including casual relief staff), volunteers, parents of students, school community members and members of the public

Implemented by:

Board, HR Subcommittee, School Coordinator (Principal), Staff

Approved by:

Parent Group, LC Board

Communicated via:

School website, staff induction, enrolment agreement, staff meetings, Parent Group meetings, policy folder

Reviewed:

Every three years or as legislative changes or improvements are identified

Overview

Learning Co-operative is committed to the process of consensus, where each individual's thoughts or feelings are respected, acknowledged and validated. When responding to enquiries, concerns or complaints we have a focus on connection, empathy, restorative practices, and procedural fairness. Children have a right to both express and articulate their needs and views and have the right to be heard. We support children to listen to others. 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.



All active members of the Learning Co-operative are welcome and encouraged to contribute to the ongoing governance and operation of the Learning Co-operative. Members may submit agenda items for discussion at the general parent meetings, which take place fortnightly during school terms, and staff may also include items for discussion through 'staff feedback' provided at these meetings. In addition to raising matters through these regular meetings, members are also encouraged to participate in subcommittees or working groups aligned with their interests and expertise. Informal conversations are equally valued, and members are invited to reach out to committee convenors or representatives at any time to share ideas, or seek clarification. Students have daily meetings where they are encouraged to ask questions or raise concerns, the older students also have regular Student Council meetings where they are given space to discuss ideas, worries and concerns that can be taken to fortnightly Parent Group meetings. These multiple avenues ensure that all voices can be heard and that members and students have meaningful opportunities to participate in the collaborative running of the co-op.

Learning Co-operative 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. This policy applies to concerns and complaints relating to the operation and governance of the school. Matters that relate solely to the co-operative entity, and are unrelated to the operation or governance of the school, are to be managed in accordance with the Consolidated Rules of Learning Co-operative.

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. Where a concern or complaint relates to child abuse, the school will ensure that it is taken seriously, responded to promptly and appropriately, and managed in accordance with the Protecting Children Policy and relevant reporting obligations.

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.
- ensure that procedures are sensitive to the diversity and characteristics of the community.
- follow the Learning Co-operative Privacy Policy.

Definitions

Definitions and some 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 Concern and Complaint list below where additional information may be needed to answer a 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 the Coordinator, staff members, or on-site parents to help them understand or clarify the facts or circumstances of the matter. Some matters may be suitable to be raised at a whole school meeting or Student Council meeting. Students are also encouraged to speak with an older student, trusted adult or family member.

The older student, 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 older student or 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 school 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 in your communication – if you are raising a Concern or Complaint it should be explicitly stated that you are raising a 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:



- Contact the relevant person as per the table below outlining your question or the information that is requested either via email or in person.
- Once a response is provided, the initiator will determine if the Enquiry has been resolved. If so, no further action is required.
- If the initiator is not satisfied but feels further information or clarity has the potential to resolve the Enquiry, then an additional response should be requested.
- Once a subsequent response is provided, the initiator 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 initiator determines that no further information or clarification can resolve the Enquiry 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 contact the appropriate person / sub-committee from the table below. If it is unclear as to who is best to contact, you can email or phone the school and it will be forwarded to the appropriate person. It should be clearly stated that your communication is a Concern or a Complaint in your communication.



<u>About What / Issue</u>	<u>Who to Contact for</u>	
	<u>Enquiry</u>	<u>Concern or Complaint</u>
Child Safety incident/ near miss	Should be treated as a concern	Child Safety Officer, Coordinator
School program, excursions, camps, classroom organisation, timetables, approach to curriculum	Curriculum Committee	Coordinator
Support for student, academic progress	Teacher	Coordinator
Support for students with additional support needs	Well Being Lead	Coordinator
Complex student issues (including Child Safety matters), support for students with disability, academic progress	Coordinator	Coordinator
School fees, other financial questions	Finance Officer	Board
Matters relating to staff including recruitment, feedback, conflict	HR Committee	HR Committee
Matters relating to parent conflicts that can not be addressed by talking directly	HR Committee	Board
Parent/Carer/Guardian or School Community member behaviour, breaches to a Code of Conduct	Board	Board
Buildings and grounds, maintenance, OHS	Grounds & OHS Committee	Board
IT infrastructure and programs	IT Committee	Board
Matters regarding the co-operative entity that are unrelated to the operation and governance of the school	Board	Board

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.
- Ensure the Parent Code of Conduct is followed.

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 & Complaints

The school's response will be prompt, courteous, and in line with procedural fairness. All matters will be dealt with in-line with policies and procedures.

These steps 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 or committee 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.
- Concerns and complaints will be recorded on a register by the HR Committee or the Board

Roles & Responsibilities

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

Staff and time-on parents will address enquiries relating to minor day-to-day incidents and concerns.

Committees will address enquiries, concerns and complaints related to matters included in their terms of reference.

The **Coordinator** is responsible for investigating and addressing concerns and complaints relating to more complex matters, such as student welfare, and child safety reports.

The **Parent Group** is responsible for dealing with concerns or complaints which have not been resolved by the relevant Committee.

The Board will be responsible for high level concerns or complaints that involve the Coordinator or another staff member which have not been able to be resolved by the relevant Committee or Parent Group. 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.

If a person with responsibility for responding to a concern or complaint is unable to perform their role, the matter will be referred to the next appropriate level of responsibility, or to another person nominated by the Coordinator or Board, as appropriate.

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.

Fulfilling the roles and responsibilities in this procedure does not displace or discharge any other obligations that arise if a person reasonably believes that a child is at risk of child abuse.

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 DFFH 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 make 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 general concern or complaint is not satisfactorily resolved, it will be referred to the Board.
- 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 register a complaint with the relevant authority; the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority.

Related Documentation

Concerns & Complaints Pathway

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

Privacy Policy

VRQA Minimum Standards for School Registration

Consolidated Rules of Learning Co-operative