



Complaints and Grievance Policy

Preshil Vision Statement

At our core remains an unshakeable commitment to encouraging all children to set and achieve their own goals and to be respected as individuals in their own right. This is a commitment to our children to be nurtured and challenged in an atmosphere that inspires creativity and independent thinking in all areas of life and does not, overtly or subtly, use competition or punishment to motivate through the fear of failure.

As global citizens we encourage an awareness of world issues and encourage effort to make a positive difference. We believe that education should prepare students to be thoughtful, peace-loving and active citizens of the world. Preshil will remain a school that puts kindness, compassion and social relationships at the centre of its operations.

Rationale

Preshil understands that from time to time complaints arise regarding aspects of our school's operation of programs and activities, and that it is important that all members of the community have the opportunity to be heard. Preshil commits to ensuring procedural fairness is observed when dealing with complaints and grievances.

Positive, clear and effective procedures and processes for resolving grievances between the school and community members can assist in building strong relationships, dispelling anxiety and ultimately providing students with a settled and happy learning environment.

The policy also provides fair and effective procedures for resolving differences and complaints in a sensitive and timely manner. Guidelines are provided for the management of situations where mutual respect may not have worked in practice, as in incidents of bullying or harassment.

Mutual Respect

Preshil's emphasis on social and emotional learning involves learning how to recognise and manage emotions, promote caring and concern for others, make responsible decisions, establish and maintain positive relationships, and handle challenging situations effectively. Children who have social and emotional competencies and skills find it easier to manage themselves, relate to others, resolve conflict, and feel positive about themselves and the world around them.

This policy and other related policies affirm that students have the right to express their needs, to be listened to and taken seriously, stand up for themselves, take responsibility for their actions and make their own decisions through the use of conflict resolution and restorative practices skills. These skills are taught in the Kindergarten through to Year 12.

Mutual respect means that every person is recognised and accepted as a significant individual with a valued place and unique contribution to make in the community. Preshil's philosophy of mutual respect is based on our long-standing commitment to the empowerment of our students, by providing respect and safety in the rich diversity of school life as an absolute priority.

Our emphasis on mutual respect aims to promote a climate of trust and caring amongst the students and adults in our school. It sets standards and provides the commitment that the Preshil community makes to shared values and a code of conduct.

Preshil understands that from time to time complaints arise regarding aspects of our school's operation of programs and activities, and that it is important that all members of the community have the opportunity to be heard. The School commits to ensuring procedural fairness is observed when dealing with complaints and grievances.

Positive, clear and effective procedures and processes for resolving grievances between the school and

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community members can assist in building strong relationships, dispelling anxiety and ultimately providing students with a settled and happy learning environment. The following procedures relate to any concerns that members of the community may have – whether these are serious grievance issues, or relatively minor concerns.

Making a Complaint

Preshil is committed to procedures and processes by which parents can confidently raise concerns in the knowledge that they will be listened to and their concerns will be professionally managed in a timely, confidential and appropriate manner.

Relationships with parents are important to us. We take complaints raised by parents seriously. The nature of the complaint will determine who is the most appropriate person or body to manage a complainant's concern.

Anonymous Complaints

The governing body of Preshil endeavours to address and respond to all complaints. In some situations the School Council may not be able to fully address complaints that are made anonymously or without sufficient detail being provided to enable an inquiry or investigation, or resolution of the matter.

To ensure procedural fairness, respondents have the right to know the particulars of the allegations being made against them and be given the opportunity to respond to them. Where possible, complainants are encouraged to give their names and to be reassured that the school will deal with their complaints professionally and in accordance with procedural fairness and confidentiality. If the complainant wishes to remain anonymous, it is at the discretion of the Principal what, if any action will be taken.

Anonymous complaints will be recorded in the same manner as all other complaints are recorded.

Child Abuse (including sexual offences)

All complaints of alleged child abuse (including sexual offences) of a school student should be reported to the School Principal. There are legal obligations on all adults to report child abuse to the police once a reasonable belief is formed that a sexual abuse has been committed against a child.

Failure to disclose a sexual offence against a child is a sexual offence under s.327 of the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic) and applies to all adults (18 years and over) in Victoria.

Complaints against the Principal

In the case of a complaint involving the Principal of Preshil, the Chair of the School Council should be informed immediately.

Misconduct or Serious Misconduct

All complaints of misconduct or serious misconduct by a teacher or a staff member should be reported to the Principal of Preshil.

In some cases certain actions which involve physical or emotional misconduct such as lawful assault or threats to the person may constitute a criminal offence. These types of offences should be reported to and investigated by the police. Initial consultation with the Preshil Principal may help to determine the appropriate course of action in these circumstances.

Complaints about teachers can also be reported to the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT), the regulator in relation to the investigation of serious misconduct (including conduct which is of a physical or emotional nature) of all teachers in the State of Victoria.¹

¹ If unsure whether the complaint constitutes serious misconduct by a teacher contact the VIT on 1300 888 067 or vit@vit.vic.edu.au

Responding to a Complaint

Informal Resolution Procedures

- **Raise the matter directly with the relevant staff member first where appropriate.** If the matter involves your child or an issue of everyday class operation, contact the staff member concerned preferably by email, explaining the nature of your concern and request a phone conversation or a meeting. Complainants are strongly discouraged from sending or discussing confidential or emotional information by email. This is best done by a meeting or a phone call.
- **The teacher will acknowledge the email within two working days.** The staff member may be able to respond to your complaint by return email or telephone with a satisfactory outcome. At times, parties may be assisted to resolve a misunderstanding, a miscommunication or lack of clarity through the support of another person, such as the Head of Campus or the Principal.
- **If further inquiry of the complaint is required** the Head of Campus or the Principal will explain this to the staff member and direct them to this policy. They will also establish a clear timeframe for the inquiry and when to expect further information from them.

Formal Resolution Procedures

- If the matter cannot be resolved informally or the complainant wishes to make a formal complaint they can make an appointment to meet with the Principal or email the Principal to express their concern in writing.
- If the grievance or concern is about broader school issues, school staff or serious issues that are difficult to discuss with the classroom teacher or if the issue has not been satisfactorily resolved, complainants are invited to speak with the Principal.
- In all cases confidentiality is respected. Only the people who need to know about the issue will be involved. The people who need to be informed will be discussed at the meeting with the Principal
- Community members may be accompanied by a support person at appointments to resolve grievances
- All formal discussions and procedures involving grievances will be documented.
- Every attempt will be made to address an issue and, where resolution is possible, it will be reached in a timely manner
- When a formal complaint is received, it will be acknowledged and the complainant will be provided with a copy of this policy so that they can understand the procedures that will be followed in dealing with their complaint.

Timeframe for dealing with formal complaints

In moving to more formal procedures, the Principal or a senior member of staff will undertake the inquiry in the following manner, ensuring that procedural fairness is maintained.

- organise a meeting or phone conference with the complainant
- direct the complainant to a copy of this policy
- at the outset establish a timeline for an inquiry into the matter and when the complainant can expect to hear further information or have a resolution. Further information would normally be within ten working days, but resolution will vary depending on the availability of persons to be interviewed (if necessary) and other relevant circumstances.
- fully document the complaint, any actions taken to resolve it and the outcomes of those actions
- further consider the matter
- ensure that no one is victimised as a result of the complaint being made

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- if necessary enable the complainant to be accompanied at meetings by another person of their choice as a support person
- advise the complainant of the outcome of the inquiry in writing

Recording Complaints

All complaints received at Preshil will be registered and recorded, even those that are perceived as trivial or minor. This helps the school to identify key risk areas or any whole school issues which, if left unresolved, could lead to harm or injury or more serious concerns.

The following information about the complaints received will be recorded:

- contact details of the complainant
- date of the complaint and method of communication
- nature of the complaint and the requested solution
- name of the staff member handling the issue
- any actions and the timeframe taken (date of action, date of resolution of the complaint)
- minutes of meetings and communications
- statement of the outcome including closure date and date of advising the complainant of the outcome

These details should be recorded by the staff member involved in resolving the complaint in the [Preshil Complaints Register](#).

Expectations of and Information for parents and guardians

In making a complaint Preshil requests and expects that the complainant will:

- raise the concern or the complaint as soon as possible after the issue has arisen
- communicate and respond in ways that are constructive, fair and respectful
- provide complete and accurate information about the concern or complaint
- observe confidentiality and a respect for sensitive issues
- act in good faith to achieve an acceptable outcome for the parties involved
- have realistic and reasonable expectations about possible outcomes and remedies

If the complainant's concern relates to their child's treatment by another student or students while at the Preshil School we expect that the complainant will refer the complaint directly to the School via the Head of Campus or the Principal.

- Under no circumstances should a parent approach another student while in the care of the school to discuss the issue or chastise them.
- Direct contact with parents to resolve the matter is also discouraged if the complaints pertain to issues or incidents that have arisen at school. Parents or guardians should ascertain the facts as best they can and contact the Principal at their earliest convenience.
- Parents and guardians with complaints may contact the school by telephone, in person or in writing.
- Parents and guardians visiting the school to make a complaint are advised that their first point of contact should be the appropriate Head of Campus or Year Level Coordinator. The Principal may not immediately be available to discuss the complaint.
- Details regarding the complaint can be taken by office staff, and an appointment time can be made to meet with the appropriate Head of Campus, Year Level Coordinator, or the Principal, if appropriate.

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- Parents and guardians making complaints are to be respectful, confidential and courteous. Parents who are unreasonable, threatening or discourteous can expect their discussion with the appropriate Head of Campus, Year Level Coordinator or Principal to be terminated until such a time as an alternative discussion time is arranged by the school.
- The School will record details of all complaints including the name and contact details of the person making the complaints. The School will then refer the complaint to the most appropriate person to undertake the inquiry. There will be many occasions that this will be a Head of Campus, or Year Level Coordinator (e.g., someone other than the Principal). The staff member conducting the inquiry may conduct a preliminary inquiry or communicate with the parent to discuss the matter further.
- If the scope of the inquiry is beyond the capacity or jurisdiction of the School the matter will be referred to an independent inquiry using an external person or body. The parent will be informed of the referral.
- Parents and guardians discussing complaints with a Head of Campus or the Principal may be accompanied by a support person. The support person can be a family member, a friend or a professional with knowledge of the student.
- Any person acting in a professional capacity on behalf of the parents must provide their occupational details and full name prior to the meeting being held. It is at the Principal's discretion whether an external professional is a participating member of any school meeting.
- The support person may encourage and facilitate sharing of parent knowledge, perception and issues.
- The support person should support a positive working relationship between the parties. The support person does not speak on behalf of the parents /guardians / carers discussing complaints with the School representative.
- Any inquiry conducted by the School will be done so in a timely, efficient and confidential manner, ensuring that the principles of natural justice are applied for all. Parents will be provided with an anticipated timeline for resolution. The staff member conducting the inquiry will record details of the inquiry.
- Privacy laws may prohibit information being provided to the complainant of any specific action that has been taken in relation to individuals about whom the complaint has been raised.

Outcome of Complaints

Outcomes to complaints and grievances can include the following

- apology - either verbal or written
- mediation - with an internal or external mediator
- an official warning
- disciplinary actions, such as suspension or expulsion, consistent with Preshil's Suspension and Expulsion Policy
- behavioural contract (in the case of a student)
- performance management (of a staff member)
- an understanding that the behaviour will not be repeated
- a change in policy or procedure

Our policies relating to the discipline of students are based on principles of procedural fairness and do not permit corporal punishment.

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Complaint Escalation

- If the complaint cannot be resolved at school level, or if the complaint is about the Principal of Preshil, complainants may contact the Chair of the School Council.
- If the complaints are unable to be resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant but the matter is finalised the complainant has the right to seek alternative independent or other advice or contact such entities as Independent Schools Victoria (ISV), the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission or the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

Withdrawal of a Complaint

A complaint should be withdrawn in writing by the complainant and addressed to the Principal and or the Chair of the School Council.

Related Policies and Documents

Complaints Communication Flow Chart (To be developed)

Complaints Register

Duty of Care (Crimes Act 1958 Vic)

Responding to Student Safety Concerns - Reporting Obligations

Parent Code of Conduct

[Preshil Complaints Register.](#)

Prevention of Bullying Policy (including Cyber-Bullying)

Student Code of Conduct

Student Behaviour Management Policy

Suspensions and Expulsions Policy

Review

This policy was reviewed and approved by the Management Team in September 2022. It will be reviewed no later than two years from the date of approval or if a critical incident occurs or there is a change in legislation.