

Communications Policy



Taylors Lakes
SECONDARY COLLEGE

Overview

The College values respectful, effective communication between all members of the school community. Respect is a central value of the College and as such it is an expectation that all members of the school community will behave in a respectful manner, even when from time to time, challenging issues may be involved. Two other policies are also applicable in this area. The Office of Governments School Educations – Addressing parent’s concerns and complaints effectively: policy and guidelines and Departments ICT Acceptable Use Policy.

Department of Education Dignity and Respect Statement

- The Department of Education is committed to providing safe and supportive work environments where diversity is valued and everyone is treated with respect, fairness and dignity.
- Discrimination, sexual and other forms of harassment, bullying, violence and threatening behavior are unacceptable
- All employees, students, parents and visitors in schools and other Departmental workplaces are expected to act accordingly.
- The Department (which includes schools) and school councils, will act to ensure that the safety, security, health and wellbeing of all employees, students, parents and visitors in schools and other Departmental workplaces are protected

This document aims to clarify the key communication tools used by the College and their uses, including the processes for raising a concern or complaint.

Section 1: Methods of communication

There are a number of methods of communication that are used regularly within our College community and these include;

- face to face communication such as meetings and discussions, parent teacher interviews, information nights and other school events
- electronic communication – such as phone, email, Compass, iNewsletter, College Website and any other material sent electronically.
- Written Communication – such as letters, enrolment packs, Student achievement reports (progress and end of semester reports), etc.

To ensure effective communication we ask that all families notify the College as soon as possible of any change to their contact details including phone numbers, addresses and email addresses. To do this, simply contact the general office. Compass is updated regularly with any changes that go through the General Office.

Staff at the College endeavor to respond to phone messages and emails as quickly as possible. If your enquiry is urgent we recommend you phone the College during school hours. Staff will aim to respond to phone messages and emails within two working days. Some members of staff are employed on a part-time basis and are asked to include the days they work in their email signature to assist parents.

Whilst we understand that the most convenient time to send emails may be outside of school hours, please be aware that it is not an expectation of the College that staff will respond to emails outside of their normal working hours. Sometimes delays in responses may occur due to part-time employment arrangements, illness or staff leave. In the case of staff that work part time we ask that they include the days they work in their email communications. In a situation where a staff member is on leave for an extended period of time we have asked them to set up an out of office reply explaining this and letting you know who to contact while they are away.

If you are unsure about whom to direct your enquiry too, we recommend you phone the general office and they will direct you to the appropriate staff member. They can either forward your call or provide you with the appropriate email address if you would prefer to send an email.

Key Communications with families

Student Attendance

There are strong links between regular attendance at school and student achievement and for this reason the College closely monitors student attendance. Class rolls are marked on a period-by-period basis and parents can check their child's attendance at any time by logging into Compass and clicking on the attendance tab.

Parents can also log a student absence directly through Compass or by calling our attendance office on 8390 9207. If a student is absent for two days without an approval being provided the College attendance officer will make contact with the family.

In the case of extended absences, such as family holidays, we ask that parents provide a letter to the College outlining the dates of the proposed absence as early as possible so that any potential issues around assessments, etc can be resolved.

Where there are ongoing issues of poor attendance and there is little improvement after school supports have been offered or implemented, the College will refer the matter to the Regional Office and the Department of Education.

Camps, excursions and incursions

Events such as camps and excursion are scheduled throughout the year. These appear on the Compass Calendar. When an event has been through the appropriate school approval processes permission forms will be available through Compass and parents are notified in their Compass newsfeed. Families can either provide consent and payment directly through Compass or the form can be printed and returned to the General Office with the appropriate payment before the due date.

Where a camp is organised, all families will receive an information booklet prior to the camps departure with all the key contact details during the camp.

Student Management

Compass is used daily in various student management processes. For example, in relation to the issuing of student detentions after-school, parents are sent an automated email to their nominated email address informing them of the date and time of detention. Students are also given a printed detention notice to bring home to have signed by a parent. In a similar way, parents are sent emails and also provided letters where senior students are booked into the senior school assessment catch up and study sessions. For this reason it is preferred that parents do have an active email account that they do check.

Student Learning

Compass provides a learning management system that enables staff, students and parents to access learning tasks such as class activities, homework documents and assessment task. Teachers can also include all key learning resources to enable student access to class materials on campus. The College is currently in the implementation phase of rolling out Compass resources and learning tasks. Families will gradually see more and more resources and learning tasks appearing as the College works towards achieving its staged implementation goals.

Student Achievement

Student achievement is formally reported on through interim reports in term 1 and 3 and End of Semester Reports in term 2 and 4. These reports are made available through Compass. Any family wishing to also receive a printed copy of these reports should notify the College. Parent/ Teacher interviews are also held twice a year at the end of term 1 and term 3.

Copies of past school reports can be downloaded directly from Compass or a printed copy can be requested by calling the General Office.

If you would like to discuss your child's progress at another time please contact the classroom teacher. Where concerns are spread across more than one subject we recommend you contact their year level coordinator.

Feedback on school processes and policies

From time to time the College will seek feedback from the school community on possible future developments, current policies and processes. There are a number of different tools that the College may use including surveying staff, students and/or parents through Compass, running focus groups, including discussions through key College groups such as Parents and Friends and also inviting comment or feedback through tools such as the newsletter.

The College Website

The College website provides general information about the school and its programs. There is also a contact us section which will direct emails to the appropriate groups in the school for topics such as enrolments, bring your own device, compass logins, etc.

The College Website should be reviewed as required including reviews every 6 months to ensure that the material is current and accurate.

The Use of Social Media

The College requires all students to sign the acceptable use agreement for ICT each year and to abide by the guidelines within that document. If a student breaches those guidelines the College inform parents and work with families to resolve these issues.

Compass remains the key learning management system for the sharing of classroom resources and learning activities.

The use of social media to promote and support school events and activities requires the authorization of a member of the Principal Class.

The College reserves the right to formally report and follow up any unauthorised use of the College logo or photos taken at the College or during College events that has not be authorized directly by the College.

Section 2: Concerns and Complaints process for parents and the community.

TLSC has developed its procedures to address concerns and complaints in collaboration with parents and the school community.

The school's approach to handling concerns and complaints is based on our values of:

- providing a safe and supportive learning environment
- building relationships between students, parents and staff
- providing a safe working environment for staff.

It is an expectation that all communications between members of the College community will be respectful.

The Department of Education advises parent that their child's school should always be the first point of contact to raise any concerns because they feel concerns are best resolved at the school and that this is likely to lead to a speedier resolution of the issue.

The Department of Education defines;

- a concern as an issue of interest (because of its importance and effect) which is raised informally in order to improve or change a situation
- a complaint is an expression of grievance or resentment where the complainant is seeking redress or justice

Who could you raise your concern with?

Classroom Teacher/Homegroup teacher	Concerns over your child's progress or involving their interactions with other students in the class
Year Level Coordinator or Student Wellbeing staff	Concerns over your child's progress or wellbeing involving more than one class or students from other classes or issues in the school yard
Assistant Principals	Ongoing or complex issues around student progress or wellbeing, issues relating to staff members, school fees and payments, administrative issues
Principal	Concerns around school policies, school management, staff members or very complex student issues, fees and payments, administrative issues

If parents are unsure about the person they should contact in the first instance, they should contact an Assistant Principal on 9390 3130.

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
- complaints about employee conduct or performance and complaints 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.

Support with raising concerns or complaints

Personal support is most appropriate in situations where the complainant and others involved in the complaint process have emotional issues related to the complaint or where language concerns may make it difficult to raise the concern or issue.

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 complaint may seek the services of a mediator when there is difficulty coming to an agreement.

A complainant who wishes to use these support services should ensure the person addressing the concern or complaint is aware of their intention and is in agreement.

Expectations for Parents and Staff

TLSC's expects that parents with a concern or complaint will:

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

The Department of Education and Training expects the College to address any concerns and complaints received from parents:

- in a courteous, efficient, respectful and fair manner
- promptly, or within the timeline agreed with the person with the concern or complaint
- where a staff member does not have the appropriate level of training to deal with the concerns or issues raised, they will refer the matter to a suitably qualified staff member and ensure the person raising the concern is aware of this and how to contact the person that the matter has now been referred to
- in accordance with due process, principles of natural justice and the Department's regulatory framework.

How do I raise an issue or make a complaint?

1. The Department of education encourages families to consider the following points before approaching the College or your child's teacher.
 - Be clear about the topic or issue you want to discuss and focus on the things that are genuinely affecting your child
 - Always remain calm and remember that you may not have all the facts relating to the circumstances of the topic or issue you wish to discuss
 - Think about what would be an acceptable outcome for you and your child
 - Be informed: check the Department and College policies and guidelines, where relevant
2. There are a number of ways to raise your concern or issue. You can phone, email or write to the relevant staff member to outline the issue or to make a time for a meeting to discuss the issue.

Managing parent concerns and complaints information

The College will record the following details of all complaints received, even if the complaint appears to be minor:

- name and contact details (with permission) of the person with a concern or complaint
- the date the concern was expressed or complaint made
- the form in which the concern or complaint was received (such as face-to-face, by telephone, in writing, by email)
- a brief description of the concern or complaint
- details of the staff member responding to the concern or complaint
- action taken on the concern or complaint
- the outcome of action taken on the concern or complaint
- any recommendations for future improvement in the school's policy or procedures.
- If a concern or complaint needs to be referred to another member of staff or DET employee this information will be clearly communicated and the person raising the concern will be provide with the information they need to contact the person the matter has been referred to
- when the complaint 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.

Addressing concerns or complaints

TLSC will make every effort to resolve concerns and complaints before involving other levels of the Department.

- The school will give a complainant a copy of its complaints procedures.
- The school will determine whether a concern or complaint should be managed through the school's concerns and complaints process or through other complaints processes of the Department.
- All complaints will be noted and acted on promptly by the staff member who receives the complaint or referred to an appropriate staff member to follow up the issues raised

- The school will acknowledge all complaints made in writing.
- It will provide the complainant with a timeline for investigating the complaint.

Concerns and complaints about general school matters (such as the timing of events, school policies and facilities) will be addressed by the principal or a relevant staff member.

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

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

Possible Remedies

If a concern or complaint is substantiated in whole or part, the school will offer an appropriate remedy. For example, 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 payment plan or fee refund.

The school will implement the remedy as soon as practicable.

Referral of concerns or complaints

If a person with a concern or complaint is not satisfied with the outcome determined by the school, they should contact the Department's appropriate regional office. The officer from the region will ask the complainant for a complete and factual account in writing of the concern or complaint and the complainant's opinion about why the school did not resolve it to their satisfaction. If the complaint cannot be resolved by the complainant, school and regional office working together, the regional office may refer it to the Department's Group Coordination Division. The Division will ask the complainant for a complete and factual account in writing of the concern or complaint and the complainant's opinion about why the school and regional office did not resolve it to their satisfaction and will ask the complainant to outline their view on the course of action required to resolve the complaint. Where the complainant 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 and complaints readily available to parents and the school community, in clear and easy-to-understand language and, where appropriate, in a range of community languages and formats that are accessible to everyone so that no-one is disadvantaged.

The information will include:

- how a person can make a complaint
- 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 complaints.

The school's procedures for addressing concerns and complaints will be:

- published on the school's website
- printed in a leaflet given to a parent when their child enrolls
- printed in the parent's handbook
- printed in the school newsletter
- publicised on a poster displayed in public areas of the school.

The school will:

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

Monitoring the parent complaints policy

The school will monitor parent concerns and complaints and consider issues raised through the parent complaints process, and any other relevant information from the parent opinion survey, when undertaking a review of the school's policies, procedures and operations. The school council will regularly review its policy and procedures to effectively address parent concerns and complaints as part of its cyclic policy and procedures review schedule.

The school will review its information about complaints 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

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