

# COMMUNICATION POLICY AND PROTOCOLS FOR DEALING WITH ENQUIRIES, CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS



## **Introduction**

Woodlands Primary School has a tradition of high parental involvement and support that contributes to positive outcomes for students, parents, staff and our school. Effective and regular two-way communication on student progress and all aspects of the school's operation are essential to maintaining this strong school – family partnership.

## **Policy**

**Staff, students, parents, carers and the community will:**

- Ensure all communications are respectful, prompt, timely and efficient.
- Adopt a proactive approach to communication to build a sense of community.
- Use effective communication to resolve enquiries, concerns and complaints.

## **Our Values**

*Our Communication should display:*

### Respect

Demonstrate mutual respect of the role of teacher and parent in meeting the needs of each individual child by interacting courteously and appropriately; maintaining confidentiality, acknowledging and valuing others' knowledge, experience and point of view.

### Possibilities

Be open to new learning and recognising the positive contribution of others. Actively seek comments about our performance from our parent community. When issues arise, be prepared to look for solutions that will work positively for everyone involved. Review our communication protocols regularly as part of our School's Self-Assessment Cycle

### Belonging

Provide an opportunity to promote teamwork and strengthen the student/parent/staff partnership. All stakeholders should display positive support for students, parents and staff and advocacy for Woodlands Primary School.

### Humanity

Display a genuine interest in sharing all relevant information with stakeholders. Demonstrate a sincere commitment to the resolution of complaints at the school level. Recognise and cater for cultural diversity.

## **Communication Strategies**

Our school based communication procedures include:

- A welcome induction to the school for new parents
- A transition program at the end of the year for kindy and pre-primary
- Parent/teacher information meetings
- An electronic newsletter
- School website
- Regular teacher communication via Connect or email (at least fortnightly)
- Term 1 parent/teacher interviews and throughout the year as needs arise
- Class assemblies
- Parent forums/workshops
- Parent class representative communications and termly meetings.



## Communication Guidelines

Knowing how to use the different types of communication and following the correct procedures helps to ensure that information goes to the correct place and person.

Written communication is a vital part of communication at Woodlands. Written communication should:

- be simple and easy to understand;
- get to the point and avoid unnecessary repetition;
- avoid too many technical terms; and
- avoid slang, offensive language and discriminatory, racist or sexist language.

Verbal communication is just as important. The way we speak to other people can make a difference to the way information is received. Verbal communication can be improved when:

- it is clear and concise;
- it is friendly and professional;
- appropriate feedback is given;
- active listening is used;
- there is an awareness of non-verbal communication styles; and
- there is an understanding of cultural differences.

The type of written and verbal communication you use will depend on the area of concern and the context of the communication.

### Cultural awareness

Woodlands PS aims to create a safe and culturally aware learning environment. We need to recognise that people come from a variety of backgrounds and cultures and they bring a variety of different values, attitudes and beliefs. Communication needs to be non-judgemental, respectful and tolerant of each other's differences. When interacting with people from other backgrounds care needs to be taken to ensure that cultural differences in both verbal and nonverbal communication are considered.

## Dealing with enquiries, concerns and complaints

All complaints are treated equally regardless of the manner in which they are lodged, written or verbal. Every effort will be made to promptly resolve enquiries, concerns and complaints lodged with us according to the principles and standards of Complaint Handling as outlined in Australian Standard AS 4269-1995. Where necessary the complainant is to be given help by a deputy or office staff member in the framing and lodgement of a complaint (as per the principle of assistance). In all cases complainants are to be treated with courtesy and the contact is to be conducted and ended in a positive way.

Complaints can be lodged:

- verbally; or
- in writing by letter/email.

In the case of a verbal complaint, where you do not wish to be identified or to lodge the complaint in writing, we will endeavour to work directly with you to resolve the issue.

Written complaints should be marked

**“PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL”**  
**Attention Principal**



## Guidelines for Parents

### Minimising Concerns or Complaints

Endeavour to keep informed of school procedures and events by accessing the range of communication strategies relevant to your child. Engage in positive, regular two-way communication with your class teacher to

- address any queries or misunderstandings promptly before they become a concern or complaint; and
- keep teachers informed of any issues that maybe impacting on your child.

### If an Issue Arises

Before contacting the school with an enquiry or concern parents and caregivers may want to:

- try to identify the issue clearly;
- decide whether it is a query, concern or complaint;
- write down your enquiry or concern;
- make a list of all relevant information only that is specific to your enquiry/concern;
- make an appointment with your child's class teacher or the staff member responsible for that area to assist with your enquiry/concern. If you are unsure, our office staff can direct you; and
- take a support person to any meetings or discussions if you feel nervous talking about your enquiry/concern.

Please make an appointment to meet with the class teacher to discuss:

- the learning program, academic progress or general behaviour;
- social or emotional wellbeing;
- class or playground issues; and
- student to student concerns.

In all these cases parents are expected to approach the classroom teacher first, this is essential when dealing with issues that involve other students/families. Parents are not to approach other families or students to address issues directly as this typically compounds the issue; please work through the school staff at all times.

### In your discussion with the teacher:

Try to stay calm, even if you don't feel it, as this will help you to explain your concerns more clearly. Discuss possible outcomes for addressing your enquiry/concern and agree on an option that can be achieved with input from you, the teacher and your child.

### Involving the deputy principal or principal

Please make an appointment to discuss your concern/complaint with the **deputy** or **principal** if:

- you were not able to achieve a satisfactory arrangement with the class teacher;
- it is about the conduct of a teacher or another member of the school staff; or
- it relates to another aspect of school life that is impacting on your child's education.

The deputy principal or principal will need time to discuss your concern/complaint with all relevant parties but you can contact the school for progress updates.

Note. To enable all parties to be prepared for discussions, please make an appointment with the teacher, deputy or principal. Appointments can be made in person, in writing or via the school office.

### Assistance

Support is available at the school to assist you formulate, write and lodge a concern/complaint. Interpreters and Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders officers are available to assist parents when communicating with the school. Please contact the front office to assist you with this.

### Progress and Resolution

Written complaints will be acknowledged within 3 school days. Concerns or complaints being handled at the local school level should be resolved within 14 school days where practical.

If because of the nature of the complaint it is deemed necessary to forward it on to another section of the Department, we will do this without delay.

The school will endeavour to keep you informed of the progress of your concern or complaint and you may enquire as to the progress by directly contacting the appropriate staff member. You will be advised of the outcome of your concern or complaint either verbally or in writing, whichever is the most appropriate to the circumstance, e.g. written concerns will be responded to in writing.

If you are dissatisfied with our attempts to resolve your concern/complaint, you may wish to express your concerns to:

North Metropolitan Regional Education Office

#### ADDRESS & CONTACT DETAILS

Level 2, 1 Puccini Court

Stirling WA 6021

PH: 9285 3600

Email: [NorthMetropolitanERO.PublicInbox@education.wa.edu.au](mailto:NorthMetropolitanERO.PublicInbox@education.wa.edu.au)

Note. Anonymous concerns or complaints will not be acted on.  
Complaints judged to be vexatious or without substance will not be progressed and you will be advised of this decision in writing.

### **Guidelines for Staff**

All complaints are treated equally regardless of the manner in which they are lodged, written or verbal. Every effort will be made to promptly resolve concerns and complaints lodged with us according to the principles and standards of Complaint Handling as outlined in Australian Standard AS 4269-1995.

Staff at Woodlands Primary School when responding to:

#### ***Verbal enquiries, concerns and complaints will:***

- Be courteous and positive to the complainant at all times.
- Assure them that their issue will be taken seriously.
- Listen to the complainant at all times and without admitting any liability, be non-judgemental and display empathy with what they are saying.
- Take notes on what they are saying and repeat the substance of their complaint to check your understanding of their position.
- Determine whether the matter is an enquiry, a concern, a request or a complaint
- Maintain confidentiality at all times.
- Record the enquiry or concern on Integris.
- Notify Admin if the matter is a complaint and discuss appropriate recording/documentation procedures.

#### ***Written enquiries, concerns and complaints***

- Acknowledge the enquiry, concern or complaint with a prompt written reply within 3 working days.
- Determine whether the matter is an enquiry, a concern, a request or a complaint.
- Notify Admin if the matter is a complaint and discuss appropriate recording/documentation procedures.
- Identify action and timelines in writing and include a name and contact number.
- Organise a follow up meeting if required (you may wish to have an experienced staff member as a support person if you feel it is required).
- If necessary, ensure access to an Aboriginal Liaison Officer, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officer or an interpreter to be present during any discussion.
- The issue should be resolved within 14 days.
- Record the enquiry or concern on Integris.

## **The Principles and Standards.**

When resolving concerns or complaints the staff demonstrate the principles and standards of Complaint Handling as outlined in Australian Standard AS 4269-1995, being:

### *1. Commitment:*

We are genuinely interested in having complaints resolved at the school level.

We recognise a community member's right to have their complaint dealt with seriously and fairly.

We actively seek comments about our performance from our parent community and we consider the raising of concerns and complaints as opportunities to improve the quality of education we provide to our community.

### *2. Fairness:*

We understand the need to be fair in our complaints handling processes to both the complainant and to the person being complained about (if applicable).

Complaints are to be handled with the highest level of discretion and confidentiality with only those parties directly affected being involved in discussions and resolutions.

Decisions made, and the reason for them, will be made available to all parties directly involved in a complaint.

### *3. Resources:*

We use school resources to effectively manage complaints.

Teachers and admin staff (including the MCS & School Officer) at this school receive training in the management of complaints. Complainants will have easy access to the person at our school that will be dealing with the complaint.

### *4. Visibility:*

This Communication Policy and Protocols for Dealing with Enquires, Concerns and Complaints document is on the Woodlands PS Website and is available in hard copy from the front office upon request. Extracts from this document are explained regularly in our school newsletter.

### *5. Access:*

We accept complaints lodged in writing by letter/email, verbally in person or by telephone.

We facilitate people with special needs to access our complaints handling system.

Our complaints handling processes recognise cultural diversity and take into account the particular needs of our parent community.

### *6. Assistance:*

Upon request, the deputies and office staff will provide a parent/guardian with the support needed to formulate and lodge a non-staff related complaint. For complaints involving staff, only the deputies can provide assistance.

School Board parent representatives are available to outline the process to follow when sharing a concern or lodging a complaint with the school. The School Board parent representatives will reassure and encourage parents to follow the process. The School Board parent reps will not make any

judgements about the validity of a complaint nor be involved in the formulation and lodgement of complaints.

*7. Responsiveness:*

Complaints will be dealt with quickly and efficiently, with complaints being acknowledged with in no more than 3 days. Concerns or complaints being handled at the local school level should be resolved within 14 school days where practical. We will maintain regular contact with complainants to keep them informed of the progress of their complaint.

*8. Charges:*

There will be no charge to the complainant for the raising of a complaint with us or for the provision of support in developing and lodging of a complaint.

NB: Where relevant, statutory charges, for example, Freedom of Information requests, still apply.

*9. Remedies:*

All remedies that are within the schools resources will be actioned to implement agreed resolutions. Where a complaint results in the identification of changes that should be made to our processes, those changes will be made.

*10. Confidentiality:*

All information and documentation regarding enquiries, concerns or complaints will be treated with the utmost regard for confidentiality. The nature of a concern or complaint, contents of any documents or information that has been supplied will only be disclosed to parties that are directly involved in contributing to a resolution.

*11. Data Collection:*

Data and documentation about concerns or complaints lodged and resolved at our school is collected and securely stored by the Principal. Complaints received by the Department of Education and Training, and their outcomes will be recorded under our school name in the Department's complaints handling database.

*12. Systemic and Recurring Problems:*

We analyse our Complaints Register to identify areas where changes are required to address systemic and recurring problems.

*13. Accountability:*

We report on our complaints handling processes as a part of our school review and evaluation procedures and school planning.

*14. Reviews:*

We review our complaints handling process regularly (at least once every two year)