



### RATIONALE:

Merimbula Public School continues to be committed to *excellence, opportunity and success* (the school motto). The school provides a caring and friendly environment that encourages all degrees of feedback to ensure we meet the needs of our students, families and community.

It is recognised by the Department of Education, and its employees, that consultation and communication, including positive feedback, suggestions and complaints, are fundamental to the improvements and progress of a school. Merimbula Public School has developed a Compliments and Complaints Policy following Department policy and guidelines in order to ensure:

- the school has a respectful and productive workplace culture where consumers, members of the community and staff can raise their concerns directly;
- all people are treated with respect including the people who make a complaint or suggestion, and any person who is the subject of a complaint;
- compliments and complaints are responded to when requested (in accord with policy timeframes following);
- certain complaints/suggestions are escalated when required; *and that*
- school improvement remains a priority when working towards the school vision of *providing an environment where achieving one's best is inevitable*.

### AIMS:

The aim of this policy is for the school community to be supported in working collaboratively to ensure a quality learning environment where all stakeholders are treated equitably and with dignity and respect when working together for school improvement.

### SPECIAL NOTES:

Compliments and positive suggestions about aspects of school services, that are shared with the school, can be beneficial to staff and program organisers to ensure such practices are considered during future planning. The school appreciates positive feedback and suggestions therefore seeks to gain such via community consultations and surveys as part of its yearly evaluation process.

Suggestions and concerns are welcome also, in an effort to move forward and ensure continual improvement.

Compliments can be received verbally, in writing to the school email account or via the P&C. Formal compliments can also be received via completion of a *Compliments and Complaints Form* that can be downloaded from our web site.

Complaints and suggestions should not be personal and should show respect for staff, students, school visitors and not engage in any form of harassment, victimisation, intimidation, racism or discrimination in accord with the school and Department's Discipline Policy and the *Dignity and Respect Workplace Charter*.

A complaint in the Department of Education can be:

- an expression of dissatisfaction made by a community member or consumer about any aspect of a service provided (or contracted) by the department, the behaviour or decisions of staff, or about practices, policies and procedures;
- a staff complaint about another staff member relating to a range of concerns, including interpersonal conflict; staff behaviour; disagreements about how work is allocated or managed; disagreements about the application of workplace policies or other perceived unfairness.

Complaints and suggestions can be received informally in the following ways: verbally, in writing to the school email account or via the P&C (via a representative, excluding public forums). Complaints and suggestions can also be received via completion of a *Compliments and Complaints Form* that can be downloaded from our web site.

Whilst complaints can be informal, complaints of a child protection nature, of staff misconduct, which have a criminal nature and/or involve risk of significant harm must be directly lodged with the Principal, or Director of Education, without discussion or disclosure to others.

### PROCESS:

#### **Notifications of Informal Compliments and Complaints:**

In the first instance, the staff member receiving the compliment or having a concern expressed to them, should be directly contacted in person through making an appointment at the school administration office or via the school email address. The compliment or complaint should then be addressed face to face.

If a complaint cannot be resolved directly or face to face, it should be referred to the immediate workplace manager in the first instance, then the Principal. For example, a concern about a classroom matter would need to be addressed by the complainant with the classroom teacher. If the concern is about the teacher, or the concern is not resolved when speaking with the teacher, their supervisor (an Assistant Principal) should be contacted for an appointment.

If the complaint is about an event or program it should initially be addressed with the coordinator of the event or program. Unresolved complaints, once addressed face-to-face, should then be referred to the staff member's supervisor.

Complaints about an Assistant Principal/supervisor, or the inability to resolve issues with them, should be addressed with the Principal.

If matters are still not resolved, following a meeting with the Principal and/or formal processes being implemented, or your concern is regarding the Principal, the Department may be contacted on 131536 for advice or to have your concerns redirected to student services and/or the Director for the Far South Coast.

#### **Notifications of Informal Compliments and Complaints:**

Prior to contacting the Department, student services and/or the Director to lodge a complaint, a formal complaint should be lodged with the school Principal.

Formal complaints should be lodged in writing using the *Complaints and compliments form* that is available on the school web site. Any formal complaint made by a staff member about another staff member should always be made in writing.

All community members and staff involved in a formal complaint must keep information confidential and only discuss the issues raised by the complaint on a 'need to know' basis. Complainants must not be subjected to reprisal action.

Formal complaints at the school level will be addressed by the Principal, or their delegate. In their absence, the Principal will appoint a 'complaint manager' to manage the complaint process. The complaints manager should gather information, assess the issues raised by the complaint and consider reasonable outcomes.

If a complaint is made anonymously (eg: via a delegated community member or P&C), the person who receives the complaint should, wherever possible, consider the issue and respond appropriately following the procedures in this policy.

Complaints should be finalised within 20 working days and all parties will be kept informed of the progress of the complaint, the reasons for any decisions and outcomes that will be implemented. A complainant can request a review of a complaint outcome, which should be done within 10 working days from the decision. This will be carried out by an independent person of equivalent or more senior level within the Department who has not previously managed the complaint.

#### **RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PRINCIPAL:**

All Principals are accountable to the Director of Public Schools for ensuring a safe, secure and harmonious school environment.

The Principal must ensure that the students, staff, parents and carers are provided with opportunities to give positive feedback, offer suggestions and complain in order to ensure ongoing school improvement.

Principals must: encourage staff and the community to resolve concerns directly where possible; manage complaints in accordance with policy and procedure; review complaint outcomes and management (or appoint a delegate to); escalate high risk and systematic issues arising from complaints; and support all stakeholders involved in the compliments and complaints process.

#### **RESPONSIBILITIES OF EMPLOYEES:**

Staff of Merimbula Public School are expected to: treat all people with respect, including those who make a complaint or compliment and any person who is the subject of a complaint; read and comply with the Department and school's complaints policy and procedures; identify when suggestions and complaints are being made; and assist people in making suggestions and complaints if they wish to do so.

#### **RESPONSIBILITIES OF NON-EMPLOYEES:**

Students, parents, carers and the community are responsible for behaving reasonably in their dealings with the Department as their conduct can significantly affect staff well-being and the progress and efficiency of completing due process and achieving a positive result. Complaints should remain private, be lodged in person or writing and not shared in public forums including at meetings or via social media.

The Department will take proactive and decisive action to manage any unreasonable conduct connected with complaints and/or suggestions and will support staff to do the same.

Complainants who wish to have a representative make a complaint on their behalf, for example, via an advocate, family member, legal or community representative, Member of Parliament or other organisation, should confirm in writing their consent.

**EVALUATION:** This policy will be evaluated by the school annually. *Implementation - June 22, 2017. Last update – March 5, 2019.*



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