

Student Care, Safety and Welfare: Complaints and Grievances Policy and Procedure

Context:

Advance College of Education (ACE) is an independent, specialist school supporting young people aged 15–19 who have become disengaged from mainstream education. Many students at ACE have experienced gaps in their academic learning and may find group-based classroom environments challenging, which can contribute to behavioural and social difficulties.

The College operates across two campuses in Hastings and Rosebud, delivering both the Victorian Pathways Certificate (VPC) and the Victorian Certificate of Education Vocational Major (VCE VM Units 1–4).

The VPC program is grounded in youth development principles, focusing on building the literacy, numeracy, work-related, and personal development skills students need to successfully transition into further education, training, or employment.

The program aims to:

- Build on students' individual interests, abilities, and strengths
- Provide practical, hands-on learning experiences
- Integrate multiple learning outcomes within meaningful activities
- Recognise and celebrate all student achievements
- Support flexible, self-paced learning tailored to individual styles
- Develop resilience and confidence
- Encourage active participation in the community
- Extend learning beyond the classroom

The VCE Vocational Major (VCE VM) pathway includes the following core areas:

- Literacy
- Numeracy
- Personal Development Skills
- Work-Related Skills

ACE is committed to upholding the human rights of all students by providing access to quality education in a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment, free from discrimination.

Rationale:

Advance College of Education (ACE) is committed to providing a safe, supportive, and inclusive working and learning environment for all members of its community. This is achieved by fostering positive, respectful, and cooperative relationships, supported by regular, open, and constructive communication between all stakeholders.

ACE recognises that misunderstandings and differences of opinion may arise from time to time. When this occurs, it is important that concerns are addressed promptly and resolved in a fair, respectful, and satisfactory manner for all parties involved.

To support this, ACE has established a clear framework for managing parent/carer and student complaints and grievances, ensuring that all matters are handled with dignity, respect, and procedural fairness.

Aims:

The Advance College of Education (ACE) Complaints and Grievances Policy and Procedure aims to establish clear and consistent guidelines for responding to and resolving concerns raised by parents, caregivers, and students.

This policy ensures that:

ACE meets its obligation to respond to complaints in a fair, effective, and timely manner
Parents, caregivers, and students are informed about how to raise a concern or lodge a complaint
A transparent and structured process for managing and resolving complaints is in place and communicated to all members of the College community

Note: This policy does not apply to matters relating to critical incidents, emergency management, or criminal offences.

Policy:

ACE's Complaints and Grievances Policy is underpinned by the following guiding principles:

- **Accessibility and Visibility:**
Information outlining how and where to make a complaint, and how complaints will be managed, is clearly communicated to the College community. This policy is publicly available via the ACE website. The complaints process is flexible and allows concerns to be raised in person, by phone, via email, or in writing.
- **Support and Accessibility:**
Appropriate support will be provided to parents, caregivers, and students with additional needs, including access to translation and interpreter services where required. Complainants may also choose to be supported by an advocate at any stage of the process.
- **Responsiveness:**
All written complaints, including those submitted via email, will be acknowledged promptly. Depending on the nature of the complaint, this may be undertaken by a staff member, a member of the Leadership Team, or the Principal. Complaints will be addressed in a timely manner, and complainants will be kept informed of progress throughout the process.
- **Objectivity:**
Each complaint will be considered fairly, impartially, and without bias, ensuring equitable treatment for all parties involved.
- **No Cost to Complainants:**
There is no cost to parents, caregivers, or students for accessing or participating in the College's complaint handling process.
- **Protection of Privacy:**
Personally identifiable information relating to parents, caregivers, and students will be protected from unnecessary disclosure. Information will only be shared with those directly involved in managing and resolving the complaint.
- **Student-Centred Approach:**
The College values feedback, including complaints, and is committed to resolving matters with the educational wellbeing and best interests of students as the primary focus.
- **Accountability:**
The College is accountable for its decision-making and complaint management processes, both internally and externally. Where appropriate, clear explanations and reasons for decisions will be provided to relevant stakeholders.
- **Community Focus:**
In resolving complaints, consideration will be given to the broader interests of the College community, which may at times take precedence over individual interests.

Implementation:**Communication**

The Advance College of Education (ACE) Complaints and Grievances Policy is communicated to students, staff, parents, and caregivers through the following channels:

- An overview provided during the enrolment interview
- A summary included in the Staff and Student Handbooks
- Publication on the College website

The policy is actively reinforced through:

- Presentations and ongoing discussion at staff meetings

Responsibilities**Chair of the College Board:**

- Responds to any formal complaint relating to the Principal
- Reviews and determines appeals arising from unresolved formal complaints

Principal:

- Establishes and oversees complaint procedures in alignment with this policy
- Ensures the policy and procedures are effectively communicated to students, parents/caregivers, and the wider College community
- Responds to formal complaints raised under this policy
- Maintains a register of formal complaints, including dates, subject matter, and outcomes, for annual reporting to the College Board and as required by Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA)

Staff:

- Respond to and seek to resolve concerns and complaints at an informal level in the first instance

Scope:

This Policy and Procedure applies to parents, caregivers, and students of ACE.

Anonymous complaints or grievances without an identifiable source will not be considered under this policy.

Where appropriate, the College will use this policy to resolve complaints that fall within its area of responsibility. Matters involving serious misconduct—including, but not limited to, sexual offences, criminal behaviour, or significant incidents—will be referred to the appropriate external authorities.

Definition:**Grievance/Complaint:**

A grievance or complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction regarding a real or perceived issue within the College where a response or resolution is expected. This dissatisfaction may arise from a belief that ACE has:

- Acted inappropriately or unfairly
- Failed to act when it should have
- Made an incorrect or unjust decision

Complaints may relate to a staff member, student, College decision, educational service, or an existing policy or procedure.

Relevant Legislation:

- This policy operates within the framework of the following legislation and standards:
- *Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic)*
- *Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017 (Vic)*
- Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) Minimum Standards
- *Child Safe Standards – Ministerial Order 870*
- *Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)*
- *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)*
- *Children Legislation Amendment (Reportable Conduct) Act 2017 (Vic)*
- *Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)*
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)*
- *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic) (updated reference)*
- *Working with Children Act 2005 (Vic)*

Procedure:**1. Making a Complaint**

A complaint may be made in person, by phone, in writing, or via email where a parent/carer/student is dissatisfied with actions, decisions, or services provided by the College.

Where appropriate, complainants are encouraged to first raise concerns informally with the relevant staff member to seek early resolution.

Complaints should be directed as follows:

- **Home Teacher:** Teaching and learning matters or classroom-based concerns
- **Education Support Coordinator (ESC) / Learning Engagement Coordinator (LEC):** Issues involving multiple students or classes
- **Principal or Leadership Team:** Staff-related concerns or complex student matters
- **Principal:** School policy, management issues, or concerns involving other students or families

The College can assist in identifying the appropriate point of contact.

Complainants may:

- Engage an advocate (e.g. friend or support person)
- Request mediation where resolution is difficult

ACE will ensure complainants are informed of available supports.

2. Expectations of Complainants

ACE expects that parents, caregivers, and students will:

- Raise concerns promptly
- Provide accurate and complete information (preferably in writing)
- Respect confidentiality and privacy
- Act in good faith and communicate calmly and respectfully
- Acknowledge the goal of achieving a fair and reasonable resolution
- Respect differing perspectives

Parents/carers must not approach other students directly regarding school-related complaints. All concerns must be directed through appropriate College channels.

3. Initial Response to Complaints

ACE will make reasonable efforts to respond promptly to all complaints.

For serious complaints, the College will document:

- Complainant details
- Date and method of complaint
- Nature of the concern
- Any recommendations for improvement

The College will then:

- Acknowledge receipt (in writing or via email)
- Establish and communicate a clear timeline
- Provide access to this policy

For less serious concerns, the College will:

- Acknowledge the concern (verbally where appropriate)
- Provide a timely response and possible resolution

4. Addressing Complaints

ACE may adopt either an informal or formal approach.

Informal Resolution Options:

- **Self-resolution:** Direct discussion between parties
- **Supported resolution:** Assistance from staff, Leadership Team, or School Psychologist

Formal Resolution Options:

- **Intervention:** Principal-led discussions and decision-making
- **Facilitated mediation:** Use of a trained mediator (internal or external)
- **Investigation:** For serious breaches of policy, conduct, or legislation (may involve Independent Schools Victoria where appropriate)

5. Complaint Escalation

If unresolved at the College level, or where the complaint involves the Principal, the matter may be referred to the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA).

6. Complaint Resolution

Where a complaint is substantiated, ACE may:

- Provide an explanation or additional information
- Offer mediation or counselling support
- Issue an apology or acknowledgment
- Amend decisions, policies, or procedures
- Provide financial remedies (e.g. refunds where appropriate)

7. Complaints Against Staff

Misconduct:

Complaints should be directed to the Principal. Matters involving teachers may also be referred to the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT). Criminal matters must be reported to Victoria Police.

Child Abuse (including sexual offences):

The Principal must report allegations to relevant authorities in line with legal obligations and the PROTECT framework.

All adults are legally required to report reasonable beliefs of child sexual abuse. Failure to disclose is an offence under the *Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)*.

The College will also notify the Commission for Children and Young People where required.

8. Complaints Against the Principal

Complaints involving the Principal must be made in writing to the Chair of the College Board.

9. Appeals Process

Complainants may request a review of a decision by submitting a written appeal outlining:

- Reasons for the appeal
- Desired outcome

The College may decline to review where:

- The request is made after an extended delay without justification
- The complaint is frivolous or vexatious
- The original decision was reasonable and lawful
- Alternative processes are more appropriate

The Principal may:

- Confirm the original decision
- Undertake further investigation
- Vary or overturn the decision
- Dismiss the complaint

If dissatisfied, the complainant may escalate the matter to the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA).

Communication:

- This policy will be communicated to our school community in the following way:
- Available publicly on our school's website
- Included in staff induction processes and staff training
- Included in staff handbook/manual
- Discussed at annual staff briefings/meetings
- Included in transition and enrolment packs
- Reminders in our school newsletter
- Hard copy available from school administration upon request

Related Policies and resources:

Related policies include our Student Wellbeing and Engagement, Statement of Values and Bullying Prevention policies.

For staff, please see the Department's [Equal Opportunity and Anti-Discrimination](#), [Sexual Harassment](#) and [Workplace Bullying policies](#), which apply to all staff at our school.

Other relevant Department policies and resources on the Department’s Policy and Advisory Library are:

- Equal Opportunity and Human Rights – Students
- Students with Disability
- Koorie Education
- Teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture
- Safe Schools
- Student Support Services
- Program for Students with Disabilities

Policy status and review:

The assistant principal is responsible for reviewing and updating the Inclusion and Diversity Policy at least every three years.

Approval:

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| Policy last reviewed | 22 nd April 2026 |
| Consultation | College Board 22 nd April 2026 |
| Approved by | College Board and (Principal) |
| Next review date | 21 st April 2029 |