



## Thomastown West Primary School Complaints Policy 2022 - 2026

Thomastown West Primary School's motto is **Together Working on Pathways to Success**. We believe that students can reach their full potential when they are happy, healthy and safe. We know that our parents and wider school community also desire this. As a learning community we are committed to creating and maintaining a positive, safe and supportive environment. At Thomastown West, our collective values are Respect, Responsibility, Resilience, Empathy and we Striving to be our Best. As staff, students, parents, carers and community members we live by these values.

### PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to:

- provide an outline of the complaints process at Thomastown West Primary School so that students, parents and members of the community are informed of how they can raise complaints or concerns about issues arising at our school
- ensure that all complaints and concerns processes that are child-focused, culturally safe and accessible to everyone.
- ensure that all complaints and concerns regarding Thomastown West Primary School are managed in a timely, effective, fair and respectful manner.

### SCOPE

This policy relates to complaints brought by students, parents, carers, or members of our school community (including members of the School Council) and applies to all matters relating to our school. In some limited instances, we may need to refer the complainant to another policy or area if there are different processes in place to manage the issue:

- Complaints and concerns relating to fraud and corruption will be managed in accordance with the department's [Fraud and Corruption Policy](#)
- Criminal matters will be referred to Victorian Police
- Legal claims will be referred to the Department's Legal Division
- Complaints and concerns relating to child abuse will be managed in accordance with our Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations Policy and Procedures (<https://www.thomwestps.vic.edu.au/page/101>)

### POLICY

Thomastown West Primary School welcomes feedback, both positive and negative, and is committed to continuous improvement. We value open communication with our families and are committed to understanding complaints and addressing them appropriately. We recognise that the complaints process provides an important opportunity for reflection and learning.

We value and encourage open and positive relationships with our school community. We understand that it is in the best interests of students for there to be a trusting relationship between families and our school.



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When addressing a complaint, it is expected that all parents will adhere to the Thomastown West Primary School Parent Code of Conduct (*Refer to Appendix A*) and that all parties will:

- be considerate of each other's views and respect each other's role
- be focused on resolution of the complaint, with the interests of the student involved at the centre
- act in good faith and cooperation
- behave with respect and courtesy
- respect the privacy and confidentiality of those involved, as appropriate
- refer to the Parent Code of Conduct
- operate within and seek reasonable resolutions that comply with any applicable legislation and Department policy.
- recognise that schools and the Department may be subject to legal constraints on their ability to act or disclose information in some circumstances.

### Complaints and concerns process for students

Thomastown West Primary School acknowledges that issues or concerns can cause stress or worry for students and impact their wellbeing and learning. Thomastown West Primary School encourages our students to raise issues or concerns as they arise so that we can work together to resolve them.

Other ways you can raise a concern or complaint with us include:

Thomastown West PS complaints processes are child-centred and empowering.

- Students are encouraged to raise concerns with a trusted adult if anything makes them feel uncomfortable or unsafe.
- Students can also ask their parent, carer or another trusted adult outside of the school, to talk to our school about the issue instead. (Information about our parent/carer complaints and concerns process is outlined further below. The parent/carer process also applies to students who are mature minors, refer to: [Mature Minors and Decision Making](#).)
- Throughout the year, student feedback is gained from student leader about what would help students to speak up when they have concerns. Feedback from students informs our school's policies and the complaints process.
- Students, families, staff and volunteers can easily access and understand the complaints process. The Complaints Policy will be shared via the website and physical copies are available from the school.
- SWPBS, BSEM and Resilience Rights and Respectful Relationships programs are utilised at TWPS to support students to develop the skills to make complaints and raise about any kind of harm, perpetrated at school, outside school, by an adult or by other children, including bullying or cyberbullying and all forms of abuse.
- TWPS regularly advertises assistance and support services for students, families, staff and volunteers who wish to raise concerns, including the availability of translating and interpreting services.
- All TWPS staff receive complaints thoughtfully, taking care to validate students' experiences – what may seem small to an adult might not be to a child.



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- Compass is utilised to confidentially store complaints, and that only authorised staff can access complaint records.
- TWPS commits to making improvements following a complaint to address the source of the problem and follow through on the commitment.
- TWPS gathers feedback through online and physical surveys that allow for anonymity. Regularly review and action the suggestions received.

### Other ways students can raise a concern or complaint with the school include:

- talking to a School Captain, member of the Student Voice Team or SRC (student representative council) about your concern and any suggestions you have for resolving it
- talking to staff from the Wellbeing room or Thomastown West Community Hub
- talking to the Koorie Education Support Officer (Ralph Bamblett) or Eva Mumbler from Koorie Club at the Hub
- participating in our Attitudes to School Survey (for Grades 4-6)
- participating in our class meetings or class surveys or feedback tasks
- writing a note for our anonymous student suggestions box at Miss G's window.

### Further information and resources to support students to raise issues or concerns are available at:

- [Report Racism Hotline](#) (call 1800 722 476) – this hotline enables students to report concerns relating to racism or religious discrimination
- [Reach Out](#)
- [Headspace](#)
- [Kids Helpline](#) (call 1800 55 1800)
- [Victorian Aboriginal Education Association](#) (VAEI)

### **Thomastown West PS is transparent and open about the steps in the complaints process**

- Multiple staff are named for students and families to approach if they would like to raise concerns.
- Students are encouraged to bring a support person of their choice to any interviews or meetings related to the complaint.
- Staff explain the process and check that complainants understand the proposed action.
- Staff ensure that students understand who will be told about their complaints.
- Staff report back to complainants to close the loop, where appropriate.
- TWPS has multiple services available to offer counselling or support to complainants as appropriate.
- If required, TWPS staff may choose to access the support of the National Office for Child Safety Complaint Handling Guide for processes.

### **Thomastown West PS is transparent and open about procedures for responding to child abuse**

- When the complaint is about a staff member, volunteer, parent or another adult in line with the school's *Child Safety, Responding and Reporting (Including Mandatory Reporting) Policy 2020-2024*, the PROTECT Four Critical Actions and Reportable Conduct obligations.
- Ensure school policies outline how to effectively respond to harm caused to children by other children, including children displaying potentially harmful sexual behaviours and sexual offending.



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- Display the PROTECT Four Critical Actions poster in the staff room.
- Ensure school policies outline how to the steps that need to be taken to make sure the process is fair for all people involved in a complaint.
- TWPS names the types of behaviour that must be reported to police, child protection authorities and other government agencies or regulatory bodies in line with **PROTECT Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse.**

### Thomastown West PS supports staff and volunteers to participate in building a child-focused environment by:

- Outlining the responsibilities school leaders have to act on complaints and concerns related to child safety and wellbeing, including the responsibilities of the child safety champions. Nominated staff should have:
  - a detailed understanding of the complaints process
  - investigative or interviewing skills, or authorisation to engage people with these skills
  - high levels of rapport and engagement with students
  - ability to respond to students with diverse needs
  - willingness to work with police and child protection authorities
  - information on support services for people affected by complaints.
- Training staff and volunteers to recognise the different ways students' express concerns or distress, such as changing their behaviours or demeanour.
- Empowering staff to maintain an approachable, professional standard to help students feel confident and supported to raise issues at any time.
- Ensuring staff and volunteers understand the complaints policy, the Four Critical Actions, failure to report and failure to protect offences, grooming, child abuse and family violence, mandatory reporting and their roles in the process.
- Empowering all staff and volunteers to act on concerns about behaviour and report their concerns, complaints or breaches of the Child Safety Code of Conduct to school leadership or the regional office.
- Ensuring that the school meets all recordkeeping, information sharing, privacy and employment law obligations.
- Providing opportunities for all staff and volunteers to contribute to the development and review of complaints policies and processes.

### Complaints and concerns process for parents, carers and community members

#### **Additional preparation for raising a concern or complaint**

Thomastown West Primary School encourages parents, carers or members of the community who may wish to submit a complaint to:

- carefully consider the issues you would like to discuss
- remember you may not have all the facts relating to the issues that you want to raise
- think about how the matter could be resolved
- refer to the Parent Code of Conduct
- refer to the Child Safe Policy and other relevant Child Safe policies.
- be informed by checking the policies and guidelines set by the Department and Thomastown West Primary School (see "Further Information and Resources" section below).



### Support Person

You are welcome to have a support person to assist you in raising a complaint or concern with our school. Please advise us if you wish to have a support person to assist you, and provide their name, contact details, and their relationship to you.

### Raising a concern

Thomastown West Primary School is always happy to discuss with parents and carers and community members any concerns that they may have. Concerns in the first instance should be directed to your child's teacher. Where possible, school staff will work with you to ensure that your concerns are appropriately addressed.

### Making a complaint

Where concerns cannot be resolved in this way, parents or community members may wish to make a formal complaint to either the Assistant Principal or Principal.

If you would like to make a formal complaint, in most cases, depending on the nature of the complaint raised, our school will first seek to understand the issues and will then convene a resolution meeting with the aim of resolving the complaint together. It is not appropriate for parents to publish complaints on social media platforms. The following process will apply:

- 1. Complaint received:** Please either email, telephone or arrange a meeting through the front office with either the Assistant Principal or Principal, to outline your complaint so that we can fully understand what the issues are. We can discuss your complaint in a way that is convenient for you, whether in writing, in person or over the phone.
- 2. Information gathering:** Depending on the issues raised in the complaint, the Principal, Assistant Principal or nominee may need to gather further information to properly understand the situation. This process may also involve speaking to others to obtain details about the situation or the concerns raised.
- 3. Response:** Where possible, a resolution meeting will be arranged with the Assistant Principal and/or Principal to discuss the complaint with the objective of reaching a resolution satisfactory to all parties. If after the resolution meeting we are unable to resolve the complaint together, we will work with you to produce a written summary of the complaint in the event you would like to take further action about it. In some circumstances, the principal may determine that a resolution meeting would not be appropriate. In this situation, a response to the complaint will be provided in writing.
- 4. Timelines:** Thomastown West Primary School will acknowledge receipt of your complaint as soon as possible (usually within two school days) and will seek to resolve complaints in a timely manner. Depending on the complexity of the complaint, Thomastown West Primary School may need some time to gather enough information to fully understand the circumstances of your complaint. We will endeavour to complete any necessary information gathering and hold a resolution meeting where appropriate within 10 working days of the complaint being raised. In situations where further time is required, Thomastown West Primary School will consult with you and discuss any interim solutions to the dispute that can be put in place.



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### Resolution

Where appropriate, Thomastown West Primary School may seek to resolve a complaint by:

- an apology or expression of regret
- the change of a decision
- a change of policy, procedure or practice
- offering the opportunity for student counselling or other support
- other actions consistent with school values that are intended to support the student, parent and school relationship, engagement, and participation in the school community. This may include a mutual agreement or compromise re: decision, policy, procedure or practice.

In some circumstances, Thomastown West Primary School may also ask you to attend a meeting with an independent third party or participate in a mediation with an accredited mediator to assist in the resolution of the dispute.

### Escalation

If you are not satisfied that your complaint has been resolved by the school, or if your complaint is about the principal and you do not want to raise it directly with them, then the complaint should be referred to the North Western Victoria Region by contacting 1300 338 691 or [nwvr@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:nwvr@education.vic.gov.au)

Thomastown West Primary School may also refer a complaint to the North Western Victoria Region if we believe that we have done all we can to address the complaint.

For more information about the Department's parent complaints process, including the role of the Regional Office, please see: Raise a complaint or concern about your school:

<https://www.vic.gov.au/raise-complaint-or-concern-about-your-school#speaking-to-your-school>

### Record keeping and other requirements

To meet Department and legal requirements, our school must keep written records of:

- serious, substantial or unusual complaints
- complaints relating to the Child Information Sharing Scheme and Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme, to meet regulatory requirements - refer to Child and Family Violence Information Sharing Schemes for further information

Our school also follows Department policy to ensure that record-keeping, reporting, privacy and employment law obligations are met when responding to complaints or concerns.

### Communication

This policy will be communicated to our school community in the following ways:

- Available publicly on school website
- Included in staff induction processes
- Included in our staff handbook/manual
- Annual reference in school newsletter
- Hard copy available from school administration upon request



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### FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

The Department's Policy and Advisory Library (PAL):

- Complaints – Parents: <https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/complaints/policy>

The Department's parents' website:

- Raise a complaint or concern about your school:  
<https://www.vic.gov.au/raise-complaint-or-concern-about-your-school>
- Report racism or religious discrimination in schools  
<https://www.vic.gov.au/report-racism-or-religious-discrimination-schools>

### EVALUATION

- This policy will be reviewed as part of the Thomastown West Primary School four year policy review cycle.

<b>Date Implemented</b>	2016; 2020; 2022
<b>Author</b>	Principal Assistant Principal
<b>Approved By</b>	School Council
<b>Date Reviewed</b>	October 2016; October 2020, June 2022
<b>Responsible for Review</b>	Assistant Principal
<b>Review Date</b>	30/10/2026
<b>References</b>	Victorian Government Schools Policy Advisory Guide



## Appendix A

### Parent Code of Conduct at Thomastown West PS

A code of conduct for parents, carers and visitors, ensures that communications with our staff or anyone who visits our school site (including an online environment, such as Zoom, Class Dojo, our School Facebook page and emails) is able to do so in a safe and harmonious manner. This ensures that students, staff, parents and other visitors are not subjected to inappropriate, aggressive, hostile or violent behaviours.

At Thomastown West Primary School we believe the following:

- ✓ We all have the right to do as much work and learning as possible.
- ✓ We all have the right to feel comfortable and safe.



We have 5 key school VALUES which we encourage everyone to *live* by our school values:

**Respect**      **Responsibility**      **Resilience**      **Empathy** and **Strive to be our best**

We teach the children that:

- ✓ *Values guide the way we think, speak and behave.*
- ✓ *Values help us to decide what is right and what is wrong.*

At Thomastown West Primary School, Parents and visitors are expected to:

- ✓ Treat all persons associated with the school with respect and courtesy.
- ✓ Ensure their child/children are punctual to class.
- ✓ Make appointments in advance of expecting to obtain an interview.
- ✓ Allow staff to supervise, investigate and manage students without interference.
- ✓ Discuss issues or concerns about the school, staff or students through the correct procedures.
- ✓ Follow school procedures governing entry and behaviour on school grounds, including any restrictions that may be imposed.

**Under no circumstance are parents to approach another student or parent regarding any incidents or issues.**

Your co-operation is sought in maintaining a safe and happy school.



*This updated Parent Code of Conduct was approved by TWPS School Council in October 2021.*