

# Australian Principals Federation



## Acting President's Message—Tina King

With the end of term imminent, we are provided with opportunity for reflection, celebration and expressed gratitude for a job well done!

Members continue to voice concerns relating to burnout sustained from leading school communities through the challenges of the pandemic. Support for the mental health and wellbeing of staff, students and school communities continues to take high priority and often to the detriment of our school leaders.

Our colleagues to the north have sustained added challenges with the recent floods and once again we are reminded of the volatility and unpredictability of the natural world.

As I settle into this new role, I continue to be inspired and stirred by the incredible passion and motivation demonstrated by our school leaders across the system. I truly hope you seek occasion over the upcoming break for rest and recharge. As leaders you have sacrificed much to ensure the safety, care and wellbeing of your school communities. You now have time to ensure the job comes second to other areas of your life and prioritise the things that matter most and may have suffered inadvertent neglect.

May I take opportunity to thank the countless number of individuals who have supported me in the new role by offering words of encouragement and support. I continue to be inspired by your wisdom, passion and relentless drive for the pursuit of excellence within an educational system that demands and requires an insistent focus on students and communities.

Next term, I am looking forward to opportunities for meeting face to face with members and non-members across our metro and regional networks.

*T. King*

### Wedding congratulations

We extend heartfelt congratulations to our much loved Executive Officer, Gemma Naylor and her now husband Corey, who were married last week. After many anxious months waiting for COVID restrictions to ease, the couple were able to proceed with their special day and we wish them the very best as they embark upon a new and exciting chapter together.

Former President, Julie Podbury and APF Executive member, Wendy Powson attended the wedding and reported that Gemma shone like a star and that she and Corey thoroughly enjoyed themselves at this beautiful and memorable event. See the stunning photos below.



#### In this Issue:

We congratulate our Exec Officer, Gemma Naylor on her nuptials.

Tina provides a great outline of the resources available regarding parent complaints on P2.

In this issue we reprint, on P3 the first in an important series of articles by Frank Handy, Chair of the Independent Office for School Dispute Resolution. The remaining articles will follow in subsequent issues

An update of the Business Manager's Capability Framework is on P4.

On P5 we draw your attention to some useful information about the Policy and Advisory Library (PAL) and School Policy Templates Portal

We finish on P5 with a letter that may assist with a way to handle parents who raise issues about their child's school on social media rather than bring matters to the school for resolution.

#### APF Website

<https://apf.net.au>

## The Union exclusively for the Principal Class

## Parent Complaint Management, Tina King

It is well documented and recognised that involving parents in their child's education is conducive to children's development and learning. Subsequently, at the core of the work our school leaders undertake is the nurturing and fostering of positive relationships and partnerships with parents and families. It is inevitable however that, as is true of all partnerships, there will be times when disagreements and issues of concern present. In most circumstances, such matters of disagreement can be resolved in a timely and expedient manner with an outcome resolution that is favourable for all concerned, particularly the child. However, there is a growing trend of matters escalating, becoming more complex and emotionally draining, and at times resulting in reputational harm and damage to schools, Principals and teachers.

The Department has an established 3 step framework for the management and handling of parent complaints, beginning with intervention and mediation at the school level. If resolution cannot be reached at the local level, the complaint may be escalated to the respective regional office or forwarded to the central office. In some circumstances the matter may be referred to the *Independent Office for School Dispute Resolution*.

Management and resolution of complaints can be an emotionally charged process and the Department's resources may be accessed for support as they provide a good point of reference.

To assist with the complaint management process the DET provides:

- A guide for managing conflict which is inclusive of information on mediation and facilitated discussion services. This is available via the Policy and Advisory Library (PAL).
- Policy templates supporting the development of a local *School Complaints Policy* and *Parent Dispute Policy* are also available on PAL.
- Principal access to the **Employee Conduct Branch** which can provide advice and support particularly if the complaint relates to allegations about employee conduct and/or underperformance. (Phone 7022 0005 or email [employee.conduct@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:employee.conduct@education.vic.gov.au))
- Access to the **Legal Division** which can provide advice and support in matters with legal implications. (Phone 9637 3146 or email [legal.services@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:legal.services@education.vic.gov.au))
- The **Complex Matters Support Team** who can assist Principals with management of complaints that involve challenging and demanding parent behaviour or communication. (Phone 7022 1201 or email [complex.support@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:complex.support@edumail.vic.gov.au))

In addition to the above, the Department has recently developed a flyer to support respectful and meaningful partnerships titled **Family Engagement in Learning**. Access to the above resources can be found by following this link <https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/complaints/policy>

Some complaints are simply vexatious and lodged with the sole intent and purpose of causing reputational harm and damage to the school and/or individuals. Principals have ultimate responsibility for the management and administration of the complaint-handling process and if the complaint is vexatious in nature, Principals can ultimately find themselves the target.

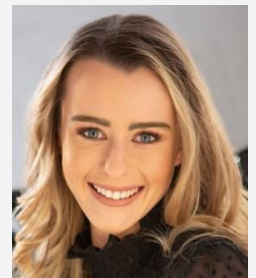
In such circumstances, employer support is paramount not just for the effective management of such complaints but for undertaking a coordinated process with intent for dismissal of the matter. If you find yourself in such circumstance, please reach out for support and advocacy.



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Tooronga Village,  
766 Toorak Road,  
Glen Iris, 3146.  
Tel: 0412 584 002

**Many new  
members**

**Thank you!**



Gemma Naylor  
APF Executive  
Officer

[gnaylor@apf.net.au](mailto:gnaylor@apf.net.au)

Join the APF

<https://apf.net.au>

Forms can be  
completed on-line.

## The Independent Office for School Dispute Resolution, Frank Handy, Chair



*The following article was the first in a series of three written by Frank for the APF newsletter and was first published in 2017. In light of the previous section from Acting Victorian Branch President, Tina King, Frank has approved the republication of the articles, which are amended only to make them current. The first appears in this issue, with 2 & 3 following in subsequent issues. Editor*

Most of you won't know much about the Office or the people who work in it, for good reason: you manage and successfully resolve virtually all of the complaints that come to you. The Office was officially opened in March 2017, and if successful then this Office won't be needed at all in the future. But until that time comes, the Independent Office is here to help everyone involved in complaints and disputes in the state school system do two things: first, resolve the really difficult ones, and second, get better at resolving disputes, both as individuals and as part of a system, so their severity and incidence is lessened.

In this, the first of three articles, I'll talk about the set-up of the Office, its structure, goals and approach. Hopefully this will help make any contact you have with us positive. In the second, I'll illustrate with some examples how we see our work and some of the things we've been able to achieve. In the third, I'll set out in more detail how we'd like to engage with Principals, who we see as the front line of complaint management, to support your capacity to manage and resolve conflicts with far less stress and hopefully even more success that you have now.

### Background to the Independent Office

This Office is Independent of the Department of Education. My Deputy Chair—Jo-Ann Mazzeo—and I were appointed by and report to the Minister of Education and Cabinet. Although we don't answer to the Department of Education, as I explain below we can access the Department, and do, in order to help resolve problems and to help build capacity. We are Independent in order to counter the perception of the public that the Department (including Principals) is a single monolithic entity that shields itself from criticism. However, Independent does not mean that the Office is *for* the public or any specific participant in a complaint, and against other participants: it means we can approach situations independently, and not be aligned with a particular outcome or perspective. We try to avoid preconceptions, and we try to bring solution oriented thinking to the problem.

The complaints we deal with are ones that relate to school actions and decisions that are not covered by some other system, and are suitable for an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) approach. We have already handled disputes over:

- appropriate levels of accommodation for students with disabilities,
- responses to bullying,
- reasons for discipline imposed by a school,
- engagement strategies and management of at risk students, and
- breakdowns in parent relationships, behaviours, and attitudes towards the school, teachers, or principals.

Typically the Principal has been involved and has been dealing with the problem, but sometimes the parent has simply disengaged and gone to the Region, the Department, the Minister, an advocate, the media, or directly to the Independent Office with the complaint.

We handle these complaints when they have not been able to be resolved at any of the individual school, Regional, or Central Complaints Team (Departmental) levels. However, the Office is NOT a tribunal, adjudicator, or investigator: we have no power to make findings about the past, or to make rulings or decisions about what should be done in the future. What we work on and care



### Role of the APF

#### Industrial Relations 101

At the APF consistent with industrial relations '101' we are concerned with matters such as your salaries, classification, entitlements, protections, contracts of employment and amongst other matters, the manner in which you are assessed and the consequences thereof.

Further, your access to industrial and/or legal

advice, advocacy and support in relation to matters of discipline, conflict resolution, conflict of interest, complaints and/or performance.

#### Industrial Relations 102

Industrial matters arising from the management and implementation of one's professional role. Specifically as a function of the Principal Class Employee interpreting and performing their accountabilities and obligations as defined by their contract of employment; the operation of industrial agreements, Ministerial Orders and the changing compliance environment determined by legislation, regulations and policy.

about is how to resolve the current issues in a way everyone can live with, so that the student in question can re-engage with the school community, and the relationship between the family and school can be rebuilt.

So we would call a Principal because we've taken responsibility for helping to manage a dispute at his or her school, think we can help to resolve it, and hope the Principal will be part of the resolution. We talk with everyone involved and try to set up a way forward, by rebuilding communication, understanding, and relationships, by looking for Regional resources or policy support, and primarily by focussing on the student's needs rather than on the dispute between the school and the parents. We also have a number of subject matter experts, including former Principals and others with particular expertise in the areas of disputes, as supports and resources for us.

We were established in March 2017, and have dealt with more than 60 matters so far. Some were completely out of scope and therefore not taken on (teacher discipline, for example, police matters, or policy rules). Others we have guided back into the complaint management system as the right place because the school or Region hadn't had a chance to deal with them. A few we took on, even though they hadn't been through every step, because of the impact on the student of further delay. The rest have been accepted by our office after moving through the entire system without being resolved.

We've managed to fully resolve a number of matters, and partially resolve others, or at least improve the communication and relationship to the point that people can work together at some level, even if not as well as everyone would like. Some we haven't been able to resolve.

The first possible outcome, then, is an agreement acceptable to all parties. If parties can't agree, the Office can make a recommendation to the Department for actions to resolve the dispute. The Department decides what to do with the recommendations.

In terms of building capacity individually and institutionally, we've taken a number of steps. First, we've developed a feedback system for complainants, so they have a chance to review what has been different in reaching a resolution than what happened before we were involved. Second, we do a debrief with those who have been involved at the school or Regional level to see what they think caused the dispute to escalate and what could be done to prevent a similar escalation occurring. Third, regardless of the outcome, the Office can make systemic recommendations if we think that policies have made the situation worse or created barriers to resolution.

In short, we're here to help everyone involved get out of the dispute in the most effective way possible. We want everyone affected to benefit from our involvement. Because we do not hear evidence or adjudicate, we encourage you to call us if you have a situation that you fear is going to go off the rails, and would like some input about strategies for managing the conflict. We would like matters to be resolved by those involved without coming to us unless necessary.

So that's how we got here. In the second article I'll discuss some examples to show what we've been able to do

Note: the following link is current. <http://www.schoolresolution.vic.gov.au/>

### Business Manager Capabilities Framework

The article in our last newsletter relating to the Business Manager Capability Framework was received with great interest by many however there were difficulties with the link provided. If you have not had opportunity to access the framework it is available on the PAL portal under **Performance and Development for Education Support Class Employees** or you may follow the link below:

<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/performance-development-education-support/policy-and-guidelines/school-business-manager-capability-framework>



#### Support for members

We are here to support and offer advice to all members at any time. If you are concerned about a colleague, please let us know.

**Tina—0418 478 807**

[TKing@apf.net.au](mailto:TKing@apf.net.au)

**Mark - 0418 551 375**

[industrialofficer@apf.net.au](mailto:industrialofficer@apf.net.au)

**John—0407 557 862**

[jimhandley@gmail.com](mailto:jimhandley@gmail.com)

**Ring us direct**

#### SUPPORTING TEACHERS TO SHARE DATA

**Teachers can feel anxious about comparing their data** from a common assessment with colleagues. How can this process be improved?

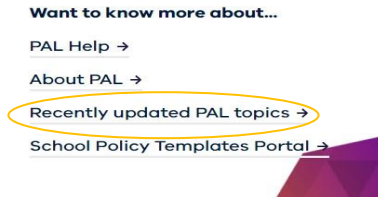
Keep the stakes low. The results of interim assessments are never to be used for teacher evaluation. Common assessments are powerful instruments for giving teachers the information they need to improve. They are worthless as a tool for ranking or rating teachers... The question that drives the work of the team must be, *How can we help a colleague improve the learning for their students?* rather than, *Whose head must roll?* Evaluation should come into play only if a teacher demonstrates a persistent unwillingness to change his or her practice. "FAQs About PLCs: Combating the Anxiety of Sharing Data" by Mike Mattos et al in *All Things PLC Magazine*."

## Policy and Advisory Library (PAL) and School Policy Templates Portal

The Department regularly updates the PAL and School Policy Templates portals. School leaders have opportunity to be notified when these updates occur.

If you would like to be notified when the School Policies portal updates occur, access the School Policy Templates Portal <https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edrms/keyprocess/cp/Pages/home.aspx> and type 'send email alert' in the feedback box located at the bottom of the right menu bar.

Additionally, the PAL portal has a tab on the right hand side (see illustration below) titled 'Recently updated PAL topics' which outlines all substantive changes made to PAL topics since the launch last year.



### DON'T DO THE EASY STUFF FIRST

**When work piles up, how do you react?**

If you're like most people, you begin by working longer. But as the to-do list grows, people tend to shift to another form of triage, which researchers call 'task completion bias'. This is the tendency to do easy-to-finish items first, creating a sense of accomplishment – even though those items aren't the most important. Completing tasks leads individuals to feel good and that increases short-term performance. However, when we examine long-term productivity, workers who exhibit task completion bias tend to be significantly less productive.

"Productivity: Stop Checking Off Easy To-Dos" by Diwas KC et al., summarized in *Harvard Business Review*,

Quote from Hippocampus, an email publication of Principal's Digest

## Criticism on social media needs a calm and reasoned response.

Reprinted from the APF/Parents Victoria booklet, *Let's Do It Together*.

The principal of a primary school in Victoria is made aware of a Facebook page that has been set up by a parent who has a daughter enrolled at the school. The purpose of the page is to condemn and criticise various people and programs at the school. While there may be legal concerns if the material is slanderous, in general it serves no useful purpose. If there are genuine concerns about matters that need investigating or amending, then they must be raised at the school in the appropriate manner.

The letter opposite was provided as a sample for a school to try to deal with the issue of a parent who had taken to attacking various aspects of the school via social media.

### School letterhead

Parent name and address

Date

Dear (insert parent name)

Thank you for attending the meeting with me on (date), OR I wish to meet with you to discuss concerns you have raised in respect to this school.

It was good to have the opportunity to meet with you. OR I would like to have the opportunity to meet with you. As we established at our meeting (OR we need to demonstrate to you that) it is vital that any concerns you may have to do with any matter to do with our school, (Insert school name) are brought to me personally. This will afford me the opportunity to properly and fully investigate the matter. I can then advise you of a possible way forward. If there are matters of consternation or possible impropriety, a formal complaint process will be instituted. We both want the best for your child and the other children in this school.

Private individuals conducting campaigns in the public view, on social media, is not an appropriate way to air concerns, because this can inadvertently lead to matters that may be of serious concern being disregarded.

We have great pride in our school, in particular..... (Insert comment about one or more of the good things happening in the school....of which you are proud) Anything that damages our school's reputation can directly and indirectly harm our children and our staff. It is my job to address any concerns that you may have and I am committed to doing so.

I have enclosed a copy of the Facebook posts that you have created criticising this school, to ensure that we are clear about the issue I have raised with you in this letter.

(Insert proposed meeting details if necessary)

Yours sincerely,

(Insert your name)

Principal