

Australian Principals Federation



President's Message – Tina King

We trust our members have had opportunity for some rest and respite over the holiday period. Whilst I afforded myself an opportunity to take some leave during the later part of the school holiday period, and despite enjoying the offerings and distractions of the Barossa Valley, it was indeed difficult to turn off completely and not engage in professional thinking, reading and discourse.

The start of the new term has ensured continued contact from members around ongoing workforce demands, implementation of VSGA 2022 time in lieu provisions for camps and what appears to be an increasing number of staff and parental complaints.

To support members in managing complaints against staff, in this newsletter, Mark Arkinstall provides insightful information and guidance. Specifically, Mark outlines what to do and what not to do in addition to the advice and support Employee Conduct Branch can provide throughout the process.

Whilst occupational shortages are common across all industries, the educational sector continues to face challenges with these most acute in peri-urban and regional areas. The DE **Schools Workforce Initiatives** Unit continues to support schools with severe staffing shortages. Additionally, the Victorian Institute of Teaching's alternative authorisation to teach ([Permission To Teach](#)) is assisting with workforce shortages however there are limitations in applying for PTT. Schools must prioritise the employment of qualified, registered teachers however schools may apply for PTT if they are unable to recruit a qualified teacher for a specific position and they have an alternative candidate with teaching and subject matter expertise.

As you navigate through the rewards and challenges of the term, remember to stay connected, celebrate the achievements no matter how big or small, and reach out for support and advice as needed.

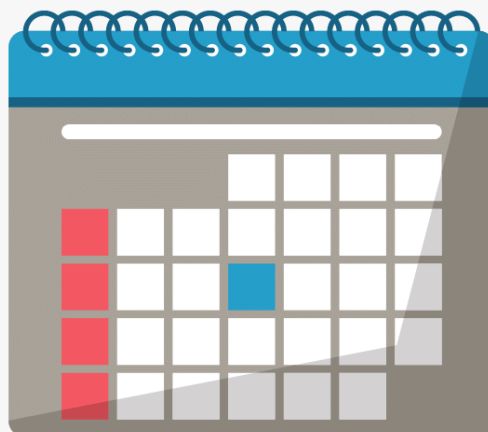
T. King

School Operations Forward Planner

Did you know about the [School Operations Forward Planner](#)? This resource shows when tasks fall in each term and which tasks schools can choose to schedule at a time that best suits them. The planner is an optional, supportive resource available for use. Occasionally changes are made to the planner that are communicated to schools through the School Update and on the [School Operations Forward Planner intranet page](#).

2023

Forward
Planner



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APF Website

<https://apf.net.au>

The Union exclusively for the Principal Class

Reimagining the Principalship

Over sixty experienced school leaders from across Victoria came together in March this year to discuss the challenges they face daily in an increasingly complex world. Facilitated by VASSP, VPA, PASS, CEP and APF, the work throughout the day was to discuss and develop a collective position, including possible solutions, to present to the broader education community (Department, Government, media) underlining:

- what the core functions of schools are and what they should be responsible for
- what the role of a contemporary school leader comprises
- the resources schools require to achieve this
- evidence which demonstrates the unrelenting work expectations

This position is currently being refined prior to release to our collective members and the broader education community. It is anticipated to have the positioning paper available to members by mid Term 2, 2023 prior to general release.



Left to Right: Colin Axup (VASSP President), Tina King (AFP Vic President), Mark McLay (CEP CEO), Andrew Dalgleish (VPA President), Cameron Peverett (PASS President).

Additional Pupil Free Day

As advised in the [DE School Update](#) (4 April 2023), as part of the implementation of the VGSA 2022, the department has agreed that principals may schedule one of the 2 common professional practice days for 2023 (and beyond) as an additional student free day. The common day for PPDs is to be nominated by the principal however as it is now an official student-free day, School Council approval and endorsement is required.

Funding for PPDs will continue to be provided to schools via the SRP, irrespective if they chose to have a common day or not. Effectively, this means that from this year, school councils may schedule up to 5 student-free days each year of which one must be the first day of the school year and one to be used for the purpose of assessment and reporting. The remaining days may be scheduled to meet the local needs of the school.

Further DE policy and guidance may be found at:

[School Dates](#)

[Professional Practice Days](#)

In light of the VGSA 2022 requirements relating to PPDs, the APF has been strongly campaigning for support for schools to implement the PPD provisions and we thank the DE for their considered response and favourable action.

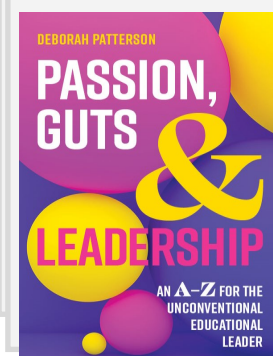


NEGOTIABLES AND NON-NEGOTIABLES

Negotiables and non-negotiables follow your values and principles. They define not only what you will and will not accept from others, but what you will and will not accept from yourself.

It was the non-negotiables that I mostly worked with as a leader. I would not compromise on my daily routine and tasks. I would prepare my clothes the day before, shower and get dressed early each day, go over my tasks to be done, read the daily newspaper and have a good cup of coffee. These routines allowed me to be prepared and feel in control. I had the same expectations of my staff: be prepared, get to school on time, leave your personal issues at the gate, be open to change, be present for your students and plan according to their needs.

It was the same with my leadership team: there were expectations about behaviour and planning for students. One non-negotiable was a list of criteria in reading, writing and mathematics that all children had to meet in the school year to make sure that they were set up for success.



The Union exclusively for the Principal Class

Essential Safety Measures – new centralised model

The APF has been advocating for more centralised and supportive measures to deal with regulatory requirements relating to testing, inspection and compliance of Essential Safety Measures (ESM). Leaders in the role long enough, will recall that this was a centralised task undertaken by the VSBA however several years ago in 2019, the responsibility was devolved to schools.

It may well be that 2019 was a few years ago, however, I vividly recall sitting at my desk, delighted with glee that the indicative SRP had an injection of funds relating to Annual Contracts/ Essentials Safety Measures. The glee quickly turned to glum when it was realised that the additional funding was to undertake centralised roles which were now tasked upon the school. My education degree did not provide for me to be a building and compliance manager nor did I have access to such expertise within the school. Put simply, it just translated to more work for me as the principal resulting in copious hours scrolling through DE, VSBA and Google guidance and resources relating to ESM and OHS requirements.



Pleasingly, from next year ESM will now become centralised once again with the VSBA tasked with coordinating ESM inspections and testing through external providers. Whilst some may express trepidation at the VSBA once again coordinating these measures, these are specialised tasks requiring explicit knowledge and expertise in order to meet regulatory requirements and it should not be incumbent upon schools to manage. In theory, the centralised approach should be more cost effective and save school time in managing the specialised tasks. Whilst rectification works will remain the responsibility of schools, it is envisaged and hoped that appropriate budgetary allocations will be made for such work to be undertaken.

You may find out more about the new ESM model commencing in 2024 [here](#).

"I believe my most essential tasks, as a teacher, are helping my students think critically, disagree respectfully, argue carefully and flexibly, and understand their mind and the world around them. Unconventional, improvisatory, expressive, metacognitive writing can be an extraordinary vehicle for those things. But if most contemporary writing pedagogy is necessarily focused on helping students master the basics, what happens when a computer can do it for us? Is this moment more like the invention of the calculator, saving me from the tedium of long division, or more like the invention of the player piano, robbing us of what can be communicated only through human emotion?"

Daniel Herman in ["Chatbot GPT and The End of High-School English"](#) in Larry Cuban; "On School Reform and Classroom Practice", February 18, 2023

from Hippocampus,
an email publication of
Principal's Digest

Victorian Curriculum F-10 revisions

Communication has been sent to principals from the VCAA providing an update on the current progress, time for publication and familiarisation of the revised Victorian Curriculum – Version 2.0

Key Points:

- The Mathematics revisions will be published for familiarisation at the beginning of Term 3, 2023 for implementation at the beginning of 2024.
- All other revised curriculum areas will be published late in 2023 for familiarisation in 2024 and implementation from the beginning of 2025.

It should be noted that whilst there are refinements and revisions, there will be no change to the current overarching structure of the current Victorian Curriculum. Rather the refinements will focus on these three key areas:

- **Mathematics** – greater balance between skills and knowledge with application to problem solving
- **English** – explicit teaching of phonics in the F-2 curriculum
- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures** – increasing prominence across the curriculum

A briefing pack has been provided by the VCAA is available for members to access via our website www.apf.net.au

Managing Complaints Against Staff - Mark Arkinstall, APF Industrial Officer



One of the more difficult experiences for any principal is being asked to manage complaints about their own staff. We work hard to build a trusting and respectful relationship with our staff and a complaints process absolutely threatens that relationship, particularly when a complaint appears to question a person's competence, personal integrity and character.

While the APF strongly believes that a culture that promotes high standards of conduct and encourages performance improvement in school education is critical, we also believe that school staff deserve at the very least the presumption of innocence and a level of support that reflects the duty of care we ourselves would like to have extended to us. This is what we expect for our members and this expectation logically extends to school staff as well.

How a complaint about school staff is managed is ultimately a decision for the principal and accountability rests with them. To be clear, you are the decision-maker and you are directly accountable for that decision. The first challenge is to determine the nature of the complaint and then the principal must determine the most appropriate form of action to take in response to this.



Please note the following:

- The Department has comprehensive policy and guidelines that are to be followed in these matters. Please see: <https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/complaints-misconduct-and-unsatisfactory-performance/overview> . Importantly, the complaints processes are not intended to regulate the day-to-day management of ordinary workplace issues and challenges. Rather, they are to be used for dealing with complaints against employees or conduct which has come to the attention of the principal/manager which ought to be dealt with as a complaint.
- In our view, most issues will likely be seen as everyday workforce challenges or concerns that do not require a complaints process at all. The focus is on resolving the matter and looking forward.
- If the principal does form the view that a matter should be treated as a complaint (as opposed to an ordinary workplace challenge, concern or issue), the complaints process and guidelines detailed in the policy must be followed. The principal then has the option of choosing an informal approach or a formal approach to managing the complaint. In our view, an informal approach is the best option in most cases.

Complaints against an employee may arise from:

- * unprofessional conduct and/or [unsatisfactory performance](#)
- * allegations of aggressive, demeaning or uncooperative behaviour
- * a particular incident



Support for members

We are here to support and offer advice to all members at any time.

However, from time to time you may be concerned about a colleague. Please do not hesitate in making contact with us so we can offer them appropriate support.

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- * allegations of unlawful discrimination (for example, discrimination on the ground of a protected attribute such as race, religious belief, disability, sexual orientation, gender, family responsibilities) or racial or religious vilification
 - * allegations of unlawful harassment, including sexual harassment
 - * allegations of bullying, as defined by the Victorian WorkCover Authority
 - * 'reportable conduct' allegations, which are allegations of inappropriate conduct towards a child, including a sexual offence, sexual misconduct or physical violence committed against, with or in the presence of a child, behaviour causing significant emotional or psychological harm to a child, or significant neglect of a child
 - * decisions made, or not made, by the principal/manager that a complainant believes are unfair, unreasonable or inappropriate.
- The principal must ensure that a complaint is dealt with in a way that is both procedurally and substantively fair. It is important that all steps in the complaints process are documented and capable of review. Grievances about the outcomes of complaints matters are common at the Merit Protection Board. In this forum, the actions of the principal are closely scrutinised.



- Our strong advice is that you should only implement a formal complaints process when you are absolutely sure this is the right step. When investigating a complaint, the investigation must be sufficiently thorough to allow the principal to arrive at a reasonable state of satisfaction that, on the balance of probabilities, the complaint is or is not substantiated. While the policy refers to it perhaps not being necessary to interview every witness to an incident to make a finding about the relevant facts, we believe you require a sufficient amount of direct evidence to have full confidence in your decision when finding an allegation to be substantiated.
- The Employee Conduct Branch provides expert advice and assistance on the management of complaints, misconduct and unsatisfactory performance. To be clear however, you are accountable for your decisions in managing complaints, not the Employee Conduct Branch.
- In the management of [complaints](#), [misconduct](#) and unsatisfactory performance matters, the principles of natural justice must be observed as necessary. The Guidelines incorporate these principles and also include the following:
 - ⇒ the right of an employee to know the allegation(s) being made against him or her
 - ⇒ the right of each party to be heard with respect to the allegations
 - ⇒ the right of each party to be treated fairly
 - ⇒ the right of the employee to have a [support person](#) present during meetings

Laughter is Contagious

Sophie Scott, a neuroscientist at University College London who has studied laughter and other human reactions for more than two decades with Lauri Nummenmaa, a brain researcher and professor at Aalto University School of Science in Finland.

Key points were that:

- Contagious laughter demonstrates affection and affiliation.
- Laughter's positive psychological and physiological responses include lessening depression and anxiety symptoms.
- Laughing has also been shown to lower stress levels.
- Studies also indicate that laughter can strengthen relationship connections.
- the contagious nature of laughter means we're more likely to laugh harder and longer in groups.

Read the full article here:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/wellness/2023/01/15/laughter-is-contagious/?wpisrc=nl_sb_smartbrief&utm_campaign=77F8DA5B-9982-431B-9E20-444163A3CF79&utm_content=F49306C6-2BE8-4278-9D79-CD3EE89152C1

PRINCIPALS' digests

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⇒ the right of each party to a decision-maker who acts fairly and in good faith.

- Employees do have the right to challenge your findings at the Merit Protection Board. In this forum, having witness statements or any other evidence to support your actions is invaluable as is the documentation that demonstrates there had been no procedural deficiencies. Having your decisions scrutinised at the Merit Protection Board is not easy and it's best to have as much supporting documentation/evidence as possible.

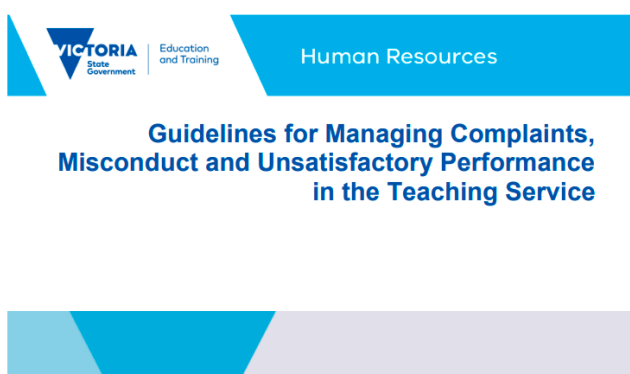
So, if you are managing a concern, issue or complaint about a staff member:

DO:

- Contact the Employee Conduct Branch for support and guidance as required.
- Look to resolve the matter without a complaints process, or perhaps implement an informal process if this is appropriate.
- Contact the APF for advice, support and a second opinion. Please do contact us if your actions result in a personal grievance being submitted to the Merit Protection Board.
- Follow the Department guidelines and policy to avoid any procedural deficiencies.
- Gather direct evidence in the form of witness statements, etc and keep all documentation in order and up to date.
- Observe confidentiality.

DON'T:

- Assume anything.
- Rush to a formal action without considering the implications of doing so and the alternatives available.
- Find allegations to be substantiated without sufficient grounds to do so. Eg. A parent telling you a certain incident occurred doesn't mean it actually did in the manner they described it. The parent has heard from the child and that means you also need to interview the child and any other witnesses to be confident of knowing what really happened. A thorough investigation is your best protection should a grievance to the Merit Protection Board be submitted.



**Deborah Patterson,
ON BULLYING**

I wish I had a dollar for every time I heard this word thrown around incorrectly. School bullying, like bullying outside the school context, refers to one or more perpetrators who have greater physical or social power than their victim and act aggressively toward their victim by verbal or physical means. Bullying is when people repeatedly and intentionally use words or actions against someone or a group of people. In schools we must remember the difference between normal human development, rudeness or meanness and true bullying.

Mean is when a student is unkind or deliberately inconsiderate: 'You're ugly!'

Rude is when a student is disrespectful, impolite, inconsiderate or thoughtless: 'You stink!'

Bullying often takes the form of ongoing meanness or rudeness.



Available from Amazon & Booktopia

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