

## Model Policy Disclaimer

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# Policy Development: Consulting and Communicating

## 1. Background

- 1.1 Good engagement, consultation and communication is at the heart of effective policy development. Engagement in policy development should be a planned process.
- 1.2 Effective policy and policy implementation documents start from within the organisation, reflecting the culture and ethos of the school; they are working documents known and understood by all members of the school community. For these reasons, consultation and communication are not optional processes; they are essential in moving from mere compliance to effective policy development.
- 1.3 Policy drives action and is the standard against which the school will be held to account. It is not sufficient for policy to be written by a 'policy expert' within the school or even the leadership team and then for it to be filed away until the next scheduled review date.
- 1.4 Successful engagement in policy development can improve the quality of policy being developed, making it more practical and relevant. It can give early notice of emerging issues putting the school in a better position to deal with those issues in a proactive way. Consultation and communication creates more ownership of solutions to current and future problems so that stakeholders share in decision-making and have a higher level of responsibility for creating that future.
- 1.5 A small number of compliance areas include mandated communication, such as: care, safety and welfare of students, student discipline, child safe standards and anaphylaxis.

## 2. Consulting in Policy Development

- 2.1 In creating policy and policy implementation documents, the project management tool RACI<sup>1</sup> is a useful framework for thinking about roles and responsibilities. In this model 'C' stands for 'Consulted' – those who contribute to the policy and with whom there is a two-way communication. Consultation should take place both at the start of the policy development process and during implementation.
- 2.2 The process of consultation is to gather together the views and contributions of stakeholders, those who are involved in and impacted by the policy. The consultation process is particularly valuable in identifying any omissions and unintended consequences.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, visit: <https://www.projectsmart.co.uk/raci-matrix.php> (Accessed 19 July 2017)

- 2.3 It is important, however, that the approval – the final decision-making – of the policy is still clearly vested in the policy ‘owner’.
- 2.4 The stakeholders are all those who are involved in the delivery of the policy, whether directly or indirectly, or who are impacted by the policy. Stakeholders may be teaching staff, support staff, governors, leaders, parents, prospective parents, past parents, past students, neighbours, the community, etc. Where appropriate, current students should be included as stakeholders in the consultation process.
- 2.5 The method for consulting will depend on the school’s context and the nature of the particular policy. Some policies will benefit from a highly formal approach whilst for others an informal set of discussions will be sufficient. Consultations could take the form of a survey, questionnaire, focus group, reference group, working group, etc.

### **3. Communicating the Policy**

- 3.1 In the RACI model, ‘I’ stands for those who need to be informed or kept in the loop – a one-way communication.
- 3.2 Too often the school’s policies and policy implementation documents are written, often at a senior level, with little thought given as to how the policies will be communicated. The result is that stakeholders often don’t know what the policy says – and sometimes don’t even know that the policy exists.
- 3.3 It is strongly recommended, therefore, that each policy include a specific communication plan.
- 3.4 The challenge in communicating policy is that these documents are seen as dry, often long and complex; their purpose is seen to be fulfilling compliance requirements rather than for providing practical guidance. Just placing the policy and policy implementation documents in the staff handbook or on the intranet, whilst a start, is not sufficient. The communication plan should seek to find ways to address this issue. One important mechanism is to ensure that the policy implementation documents (procedures, checklists, guidance, etc.) are written in very straightforward language, are as brief as possible, practical and useful.
- 3.5 There are many ways that policy can be communicated: the website, intranet, staff handbook, staff meetings, newsletters, small group briefings, posters, etc. Schools are advised to use more than one form of communication media so that predictability and complacency is reduced.
- 3.6 Typically, when policy is communicated, it happens at the start of the school year or perhaps during the induction process. In order to help make policies live and become working documents, the communication should be frequent and ‘short and sharp’. Continuing to foster engagement is key to ensuring that policy is fully embedded within the school’s culture.

## 4. Mandated Communication

4.1 Some school policies require a communication plan or evidence of how policies are communicated. These may be detailed in the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority's (VRQA) *Minimum Standards*<sup>2</sup> publication or in Ministerial Orders and include:

**a. Care, Safety and Welfare of Students:**

'There must also be evidence of how the school communicates policies and procedures on the care, safety and welfare of students to staff, students, guardians, parents and the school community.' (VRQA p. 22)

**b. Student Discipline:**

'There must be evidence in the form of an outline of how the school communicates these policies and procedures [discipline; not permitting corporal punishment] to the school community.' (VRQA p.23)

**c. Child Safe Standards:**

'The school must inform the school community about the strategies [to embed an organisational culture of child safety], and allocated roles and responsibilities' (Ministerial Order 870, 7 (1)(c))<sup>3</sup>

The school must 'put the strategies into practice, and inform the school community about these practices'. (Ministerial Order 870 7 (1)(d))

'The school governing authority must inform the school community about the policy or statement [of commitment to child safety], and make the policy or statement publicly available.' (Ministerial Order 870 8(2))

**d. Anaphylaxis:**

'A school's anaphylaxis management policy must contain a communication plan.' (Ministerial Order 706\_11)<sup>4</sup>

## 5. Monitoring Engagement

5.1 The test of how well the school involves its stakeholders in knowing and understanding policy is to monitor engagement. Some very simple but intentional questions, such as 'tell me about the school's policy or guidance on xx' will provide the school with a starting point for exploring how well policies are being communicated.

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2 <http://www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/registration/Pages/schminsdards.aspx> (Accessed 19 July 2017)

3 Ministerial Order No. 870 – Child Safe Standards - Managing the risk of child abuse in schools – <http://www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/childsafes/Pages/documents/Min%20Order%20870%20Child%20Safe%20Standards.pdf> (Accessed 19 July 2017)

4 Ministerial Order 706 – Anaphylaxis Management in Victorian Schools – <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/Pages/anaphylaxisschl.aspx> (Accessed 19 July 2017)